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HILARY'S
LOVE STORY
By
GEORGIANA M CRAIK.

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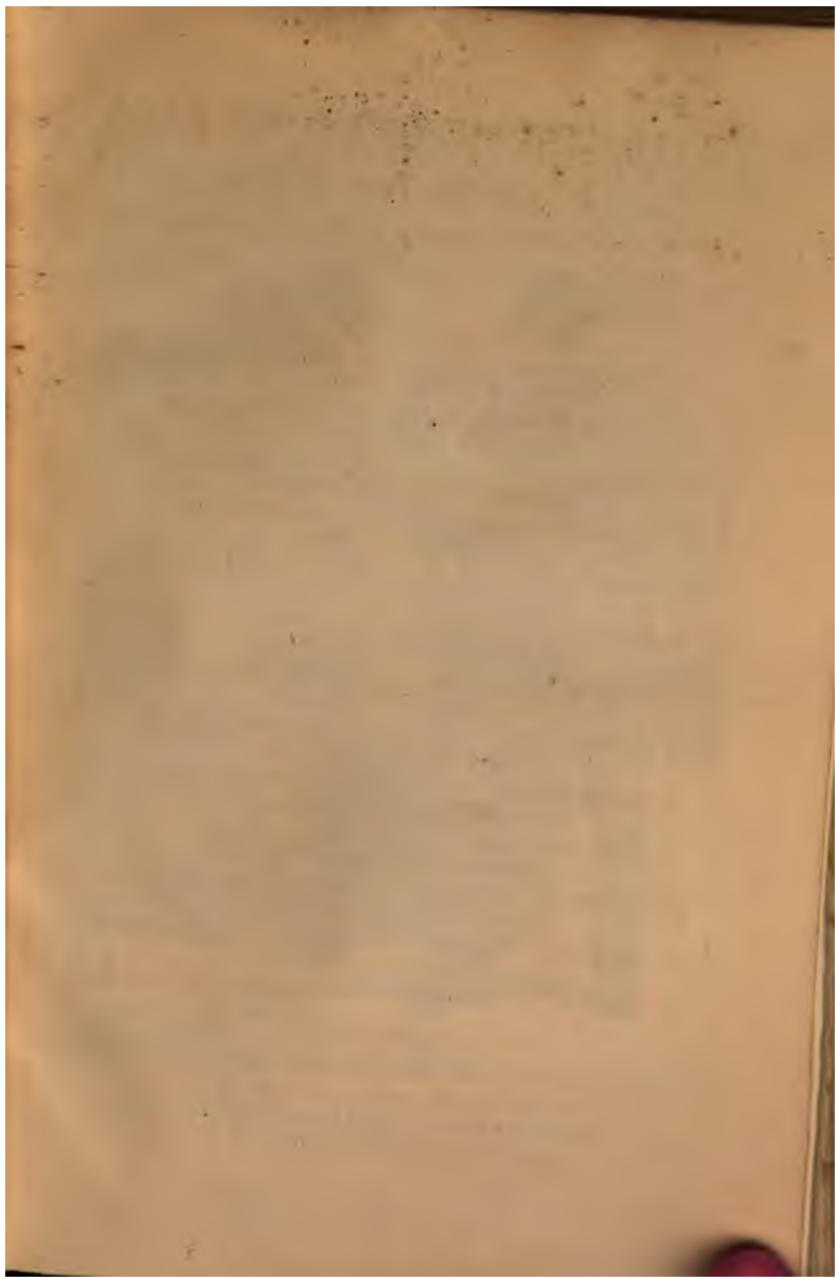
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"IN TWO SECONDS AFTERWARDS THE BOY WAS LYING, SPRAWLING IN
A BED OF FURZE AND BRACKEN."—p. 74.

HILARY'S LOVE STORY

BY

GEORGIANA M. CRAIK

AUTHOR OF "MILDRED," "FAITH UNWIN'S ORDEAL," "ESTHER
HILL'S SECRET," &c., &c.

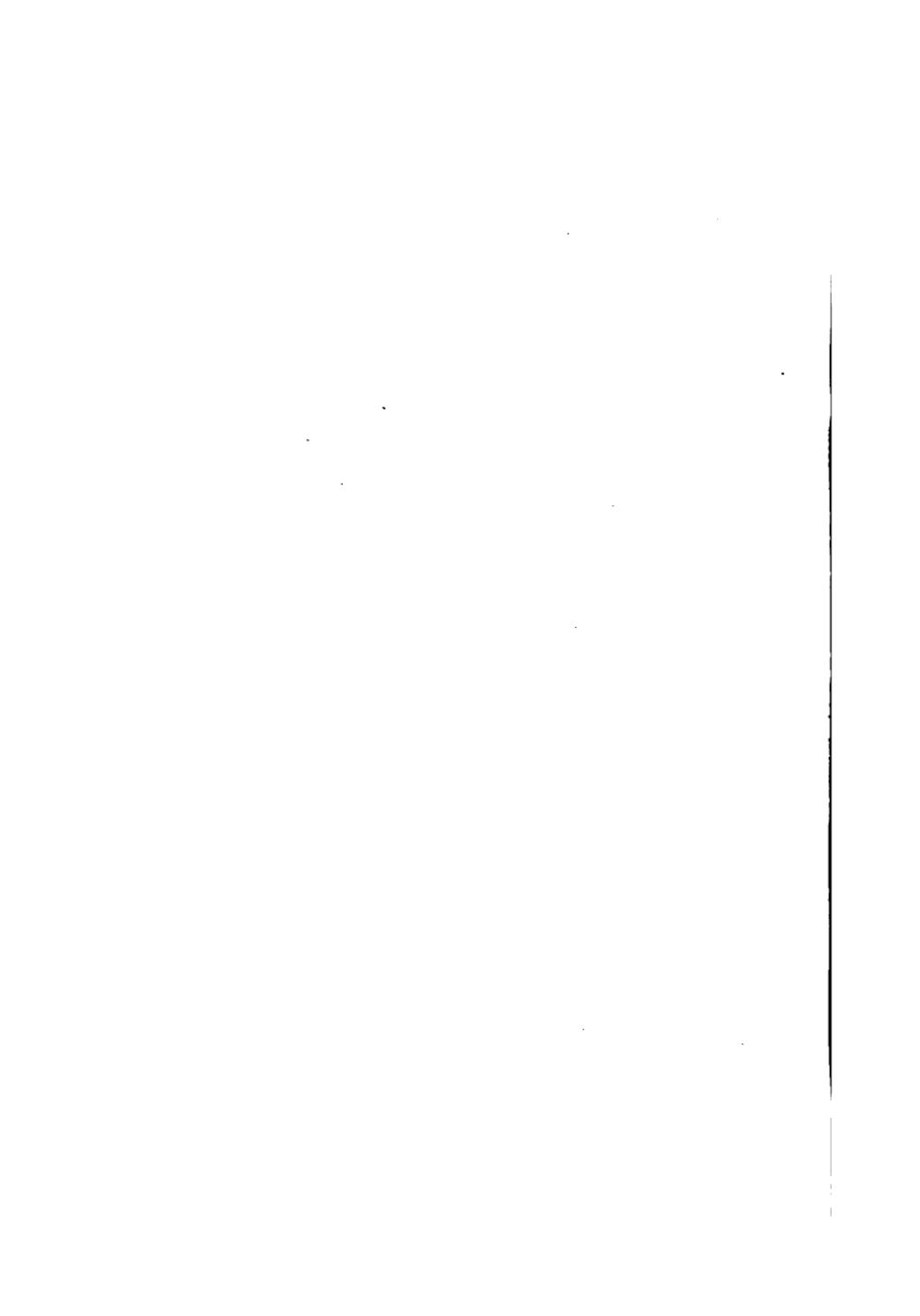
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HILARY'S LOVE STORY.

CHAPTER I.

THE END OF A HOLIDAY.

“**B**OYS!” said Hilary, with great severity. But the boys knew what Hilary's severity was worth, and let themselves be apostrophised with entire indifference.

“They are quite intolerable,” said Hilary's father.

“Quite!” responded Hilary, with fervour.

“If it weren't for my lameness, I'd be after them, and lay my stick on some of their shoulders,” said Mr. Austin.

“Shall I go instead of you?” enquired Hilary, instantly; and she was off next moment like an arrow from a bow.

“Boys, you are making Papa cross. Why in

the world can you not keep from shouting till you are out of sound of the house?" she exclaimed, arriving breathless in the midst of the little group.
"Now where are you going?" she said.

"Oh, I don't know," answered Cuthbert, the eldest of the four. "Just somewhere for a bit of fun."

"Do you want me with you?"

"Of course we do."

"Well, I had not meant to come," said Hilary, thoughtfully; "but as I suppose it will be for the last time——"

But at this the boys raised a howl; and then Hilary laughed, and in another minute they had all swept out at the garden-gate together; and an hour afterwards you might still have seen Hilary, almost the foremost of the group, laughing, talking, leaping lightly over the heather and the bracken—conducting herself, in fact, as her father often said of her with a groan, like the worst tom-boy of them all.

Mr. Austin was a bookish man, with theories on the subject of education; rather a sour-tempered man too, the original acid of whose nature had not been sweetened by the circumstances of his life, for he had been left a widower while his children were very young, and the management of these olive branches had been no small trial to him.

He had this one daughter, Hilary, and four sons, and it had been one of his whims not to send his boys to school, because a father was his sons' natural schoolmaster, he held. So he had made himself his sons' schoolmaster, and the consequent friction and discomfort from that arrangement had been great, nor had the results achieved proved very encouraging. As little fellows, their mother had taught her children; but Hilary was only fourteen at the time of her death, and the eldest of the four boys about ten, and it was during the years that had followed since then that the lads had done their uneasy schooling with their father, Mr. Austin, if not patiently, at least obstinately, continuing to pursue an experiment that was, to say the least, as irksome and unsatisfactory to himself as to his children, with a persistency that blinded him to the mischief he was doing. For, of course, the boys grew up with little love for him. In their sight he was less their father than a harsh and often unreasonable pedagogue; and to him, in some of his moods at any rate, they were hardly so much his sons as four imps sent by Satan to buffet him.

It was for four years that this state of things had continued, when an end came to it at last. Mr. Austin was seized one morning with paralysis.

It was not a very serious attack ; he recovered from it wonderfully well ; but his physician, when he was convalescent, warned him that, for the future, all irritating and exciting occupations must be laid aside.

" You may read as much as you like," he told him, " and you may write as long as you can do it without fatigue ; but you must send those lads of yours to school."

" Send them to school ! You may as soon tell me to send them to the devil !" exclaimed Mr. Austin, irate in a moment.

" Well, if you take that view of it," replied the Doctor, shrugging his shoulders, " I can only say, dispose of them as you please, only you mustn't teach them yourself."

" I don't see the necessity for making any change," said Mr. Austin, obstinately.

" My dear sir, *you* may not see the necessity, but anyone else would see it as plain as a pike-staff," exclaimed the Doctor. " You've had a warning, and you mustn't treat yourself as if you hadn't. Come, why in the world should those lads of yours be brought up differently from all other lads ?"

" Because I have different opinions from other men," said Mr. Austin, loftily.

And then the Doctor saw it was a hopeless case, and quietly shook his head.

"When a man holds exclusive opinions, of course it's useless to argue with him," he said, good humouredly; "so, my dear sir, all I repeat is, that you mustn't continue to teach your boys yourself. Do anything else you like with them; but, if you value your life, don't do that."

Mr. Austin was too obstinate to promise submission with his lips; but of course he knew in his heart that he must submit—and perhaps he even secretly felt a sense of relief in that knowledge. For the toil of these last years had been great, and the reward small; and, in truth, he was almost conscious that his power to renew the battle was pretty well gone. "I must husband the little strength I have left," he said to himself; "I have done what I could; I have not spared myself; I have not voluntarily taken my own ease."

This was true enough; and the tears came to Hilary's eyes when he quietly, a day or two afterwards, said some such words to her.

"You have not taken your own ease indeed," she assented eagerly; "I only wish you had. You have worked far, far too hard."

"No, it was not too hard while I had the

power," he said; "but now the power is gone. Yet, Hilary," he added, firmly, "I will not send the boys to school."

"Then what will you do with them?" asked Hilary, opening her eyes wide, as a vision rose before her of these four lads, like four untamed colts, ranging loose over the house.

"What *can* I do?" Mr. Austin groaned. "There is only one thing possible—they must have a tutor."

"Oh! to be sure," said Hilary, relieved.

"Only the difficulty will be to find one."

"*Will* that be very difficult?" asked Hilary, diffidently. "I thought there were plenty of them."

"There are certainly not plenty to whom I should be ready to confide the education of my children," said Mr. Austin, with emphasis; and then, of course, Hilary felt rebuked.

But still her mind naturally could not take in the belief that the quest before them was likely to be so onerous a one, and her spirits rose involuntarily, as she thought that the weary and disappointing work of so many years was at last to cease.

"I am afraid the boys have been a terrible trouble to you, Father," she ventured to say,

sympathetically, after a few moments ; but Mr. Austin at once raised his hand to silence her.

"We have none of us any right to complain of the work that we bring upon ourselves, Hilary," he answered, in his cold way.

And then she thought she had better hold her peace. Her father was not a man who took pleasure in receiving sympathy from any one—least of all from his own children. So Hilary said no more, and Mr. Austin set himself down before his desk.

He must take some immediate steps, he felt, to procure this necessary teacher for his children, but yet he was very much in the dark as to what steps to take. That he himself was quite unacquainted with any man competent to undertake the work he wished to have done, he was completely aware ; nor—as they lived in the country, in a very quiet place, with no town within seven or eight miles of them—did he at all expect that the neighbourhood would be able to supply his need.

"I must have a university man ; that I make a *sine qua non*," he said to himself ; "and not too young a man. I'll have none of those jackanapes fresh from taking their degree ; they're puppies, every one of them. He must be thirty at the least—thirty, or five-and-thirty, I should say.

Would Reynolds be able to find me the right sort of man, I wonder?"

And then he meditated for a little while, and presently took up his pen, and wrote to Mr. Reynolds—who was an old college friend of his, and a fellow of Magdalene—and asked him if he could help him to procure the kind of tutor that he had in his mind.

It was fine summer weather, and the boys were having a royal holiday. For three entire months—ever since the beginning of Mr. Austin's illness—they had been doing pretty well what they pleased, and this long swing of liberty had brought them to a terrible state of insubordination. They were not bad boys, but the love of idleness and of noise had been largely developed in them, and never before had they had such free scope for the enjoyment of these tastes with which they were so abundantly and unanimously gifted. From morning to night their one occupation had been to enjoy the shining hours. Happily for the peace of the house, they pursued their employment for the most part out of doors, spending little time within beyond those hours which were necessarily devoted to the refreshment of their young spirits by food or sleep, and consequently the house had had, all things considered, not quite so bad a time of it as

might have been expected. But as for the pranks that the four young cubs played abroad, they had become something little short of terrible. There was no boyish mischief too foolish to tempt them, no practical joke too dangerous for them to leave untried. Day after day they put their legs and arms and heads in peril, till it became a standing miracle that they returned home each night alive. Even Hilary, who had, as her father said, an unlimited sympathy with folly, had begun to feel that things were going too far, and that the time for restraint had well-nigh arrived.

"And yet they don't mean any harm," she often thought to herself, "and they don't really do anything that is wrong. It is nothing but their high spirits. Only they vex Papa so much, and I do wish they would think of that a little more."

And then she would put on a severe face, and would try to lecture them.

"Boys, you are really dreadful," she exclaimed one day; "and you, Cuthbert, who are eldest, and ought to be best, you are the worst of all. You are fourteen, and at fourteen people ought at any rate to have *begun* to have a conscience. If you go on like this, you will never come to any good."

But this address, though it was excellent and

greatly needed, I am sorry to say quite failed to produce the effect that Hilary desired.

"Hear, hear!" was the only response that was made by Cuthbert the impenitent, and, as he made it, there was a painful tone of irony in his voice. And then the other three all laughed.

"*She's* a pretty one to preach, isn't she?" said Bob.

"Oh! she doesn't mean it," cried Harry, who was the youngest and rather the mildest of the four.

"It would be queer if she did," exclaimed Dick, the *enfant terrible* of the family, "for she's the worst herself of the whole lot of us."

How could Hilary go on preaching little sermons to such an audience as this? Perhaps her conscience sometimes smote her, and hampered her tongue a little—for in fact it was true that she had no small sympathy with her brothers' mad proceedings, though she restrained the expression of it as far as she could through considerations of another kind. "Oh, boys, think a little more of Papa!" she would sometimes exclaim to them—and, to do them justice, this appeal did touch them now and then; for, though love for their father was not an ardent feeling in their breasts, yet they respected him at least, and they were sorry for

him. "Poor old Dad," they had got to call him since his stroke—which had awed them a good deal at first, though afterwards, when they saw him going about again, looking not very different from what he had looked before, that solemnising effect, it must be confessed, had for the most part passed away.

Mr. Reynolds returned a prompt reply to Mr. Austin's letter.

"I know of one admirable man," he wrote—"the very one, I believe, to suit you—only I don't know how he is employed just now. It is Hardy, who, you will remember, was so long with poor young Leslie, and whom they all liked so much. He is a first rate tutor. I will write to Leslie by to-day's post, and inquire about him."

Two or three days later, there came another letter.

"Hardy is abroad—has been abroad for some time, it seems—but is expected home in a few weeks. From what Leslie tells me, I think it would be worth your while to wait for him, and, if you would really care to secure his services, I should say you had better write to him at once. Here is his address;" and then he gave it. "He has been staying in Italy with an invalid cousin, but Leslie believes that he will be open to an

engagement when he gets back to England, so the chances are that you may have him for the asking. I really think he would suit you, for he is a quiet modest man, with a great deal of ability."

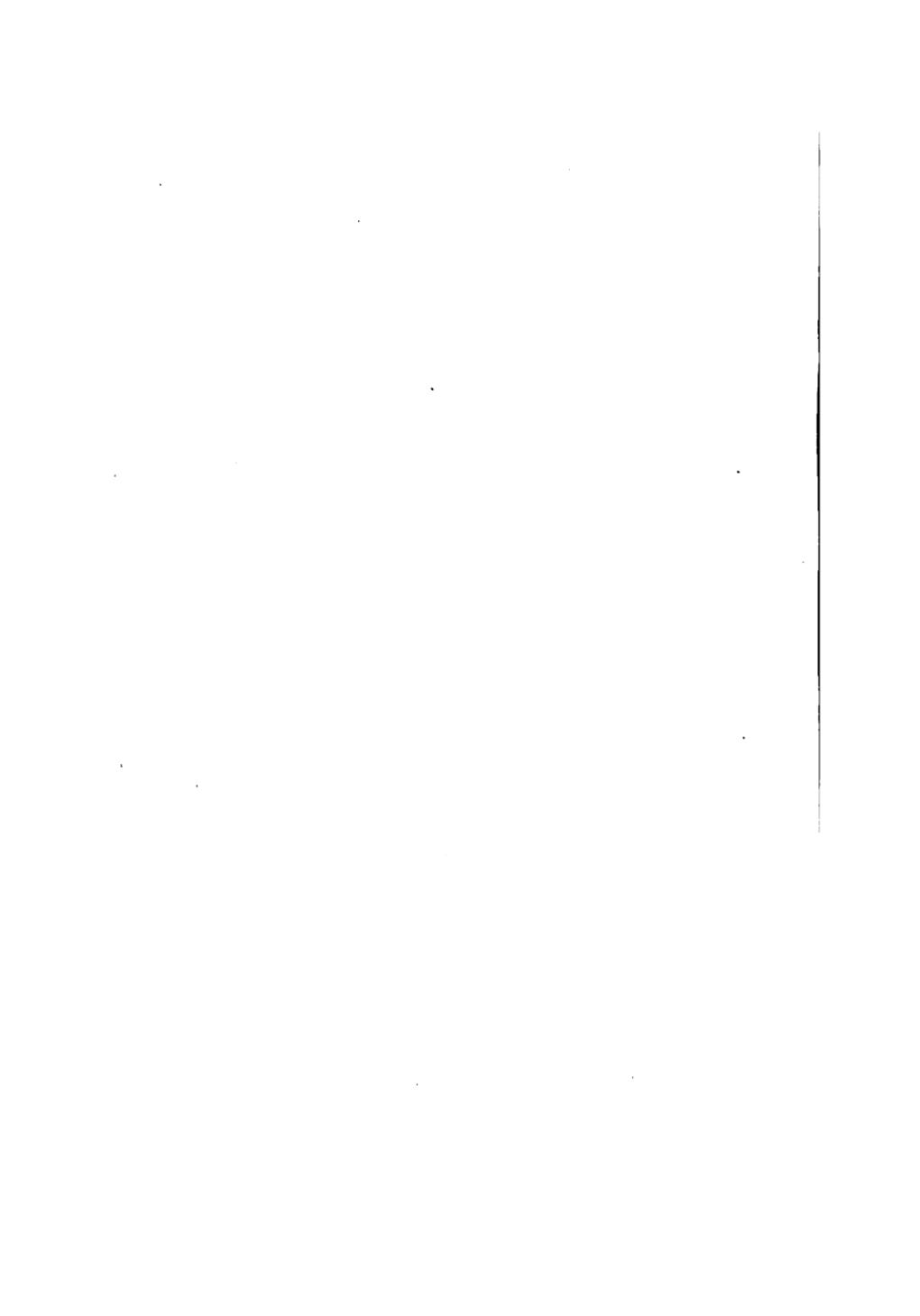
"Yes, he seems to be the sort of person I am looking for," Mr. Austin said to himself, after reading this second letter. "I remember Leslie always thought very highly of him. I had better see if he will come, I suppose." And so, that same day, Mr. Austin wrote, and asked Mr. Hardy if he would take charge of his sons.

In the course of a week the matter was arranged. "I can come to you at the beginning of October," Mr. Hardy replied. "If the first of October should suit you, I could be with you on that day." It was accordingly settled so, and then, when all was decided, the future that lay before the four boys was formally announced to them by their father—though of course they had known all about it long before that, Hilary—not being bound to secrecy—having naturally communicated to them the important negotiations that were on foot.

The announcement took place one evening when the lads were just about to go to bed. It was not Mr. Austin's habit at this time to see much of his sons, but they were always accustomed to bid



"THE FOUR BOYS STOOD IN SILENCE."



good-night to him, and so, on this special evening, they had jostled one another into his study, expecting to go through the nightly ceremony of leave-taking with their usual celerity, when he arrested them in their customary movements by raising his hand.

"I wish to speak to you for a moment. Dick, shut the door," he said.

So then Dick shut the door, and the four boys stood in silence, and kicked their heels. They were not quite at ease as they kicked their heels; their consciences were perhaps too heavily burdened at this time to make perfect ease entirely attainable, and they glanced at one another with eyes not devoid of alarm. But, after only a very short pause, Mr. Austin put them out of their pain.

"Boys," he said, "I have this day completed the arrangements I have been making with regard to your future studies. For myself, I shall never teach you again." (Cuthbert at this made a sudden shuffle. Boys are not demonstrative, but the young scamp's heart at these words smote him.) "My day for such work is over, and I can only hope that under a different master you may make more progress than you have ever made with me." (All four boys hung their heads here.) "The tutor I

have engaged for you is a Mr. Hardy, a Balliol man, and a man of most scholarly tastes." ("Oh, dear!" sighed Bob, whose own tastes lay quite in an opposite direction. "I have arranged with him to join us here upon the first of October."

There was a pause after this, but none of the boys spoke; and, after a little silence, Mr. Austin resumed his address in a sterner tone.

"It is now more than three months," he said, "since I was struck by that illness which, as I think you are all aware, has been to me the first forerunner of death." (There was a general movement, a sort of writhe, amongst the boys when he said these words; they did not perhaps love their father very much, but the thought of such a thing as that of which he spoke made their young hearts shrink.) "For more than three months, while I have been laid aside, you have been left to waste your days in idleness. I will not say now all that I might of the way in which those days have been passed. I merely say, you have been your own masters, and you have proved to me, to the utmost of your power, how unfit you are to be trusted with such a gift as liberty. But, though your conduct has lowered you all in my estimation, and you especially, Cuthbert"—and he fixed his eyes on that young culprit's face till the poor lad

flushed scarlet—"for it was your part unquestionably to set an example before your younger brothers, yet as to all that I will say nothing more. I make some allowance for the unfortunate circumstances in which you have been placed. Let it pass. What is of most consequence now is the future. In a fortnight Mr. Hardy will be here. I can no longer watch over you, or spend myself for you; I must leave you to your tutor and to your own consciences. Understand—I wish you all to understand—that I put you upon your honour. If you have no regard either for me or for yourselves, you will waste the advantages I have provided for you; but if you have any sense of duty, or any self-respect, or any feeling as of sons for their father, then you will make use of them and value them. Now I will say no more. I wish you all good night."

And with that Mr. Austin took up the book again that he had been reading when the boys came in, and his four sons shambled out of the room, and went up to their respective apartments in a silence that no one had the hardihood to break.

However, though they were greatly solemnised and depressed for the moment, of course most of the effect of their father's lecture went off pretty

soon, and after a day or two had passed (except that they still could not think without a secret pang of the reference he had made to his own death), the only result that remained apparent from his exhortation was a certain hostility that it had aroused in their breasts against Mr. Hardy. They one and all made up their minds that their coming tutor was an obnoxious and offensive person.

"He's as old as Methuselah, to begin with," said Cuthbert.

"And he's a prig—he's certain to be," cried Harry.

"Oh, he's a regular demagogue," exclaimed Dick, contemptuously, meaning "pedagogue," of course; but the others were not particular, and found no fault with Dick's nomenclature.

"I wonder if he'll lick us," Bob only said, meditatively, after a little silence, and then Cuthbert gave a snort of indignation.

"I'd like to see him lick *me*," he said. "He'd better not try, or I'll pitch him into the day after to-morrow."

And with this manful assertion Cuthbert strode away, leaving his three brothers filled with natural admiration.

It was pretty bitter to them to feel that these were their last days of liberty. Even Hilary was

sorry in her heart, and sympathised with them. "I do hope he will be nice," she kept saying to herself, meaning by "he" Mr. Hardy, of course; but yet she had not much belief that he would be nice. As a general rule, she argued, tutors could not be very pleasant people. They had such disagreeable work to do that nobody, she believed, would choose to do it voluntarily who was not naturally rather stiff and disagreeable too. But yet she would not quite let the boys know what she thought.

"I daresay he teaches very well; Mr. Reynolds says he does. Teaching is not very nice perhaps, but still I do think," she would say to them earnestly, "that we always respect the people who do that—or anything else—really well. And he *may* be nicer than we suppose, you know," she would add, a little dubiously, not having courage to make so unlikely a suggestion except in quite a tentative way.

"Well, there's no help for it," Cuthbert said at last; "that's clear. And I suppose something of the sort was sure to happen sooner or later," he added philosophically; "so let's have all the fun we can before he comes, and then make the best of it."

And, as of course what Cuthbert said was

accepted by the other boys (for the most part, at any rate) as law, they presently devoted themselves to the work of carrying out this programme with a success that, if it roused little admiration in the breasts of outsiders, at least undoubtedly and largely pleased themselves.

But all delights pass away, and in less than a fortnight this final spirit of holiday-making reached its end. It was the last day of September. The trees were beginning to get a mellow tone ; the harvest fields were almost empty.

"They are cutting the last wheat to-day on Wilson's farm," Cuthbert said, when they were starting for their final ramble. "The men told me they would finish before dark. I vote we go and see if we can catch some rabbits."

But Hilary had joined them, and she objected to Cuthbert's proposition.

"You are always wanting to hunt things and kill them, and I can't bear it," she exclaimed. "Let the poor rabbits alone. I'll play hide-and-seek with you in the Hollow, if you like—or I'll tell you stories—or you can run races, and I'll keep time for you—or we might go on the river, Cuthbert. That is what I should like best; I haven't been in the boat for such a long time."

"Well, it's your own fault if you haven't," retorted Cuthbert, not very graciously. "But all right; if that's what you want, come along."

The river and the boat were close at hand, and they were soon afloat. They rowed up stream for two or three miles, their two pair of oars making the little craft fly rapidly along. "I think this is rather jolly," Cuthbert condescended to say, after a time. He had been a little disposed at first to feel that he was sacrificing himself to his sister's taste—giving up the noble game of rabbit-hunting for a much tamer sort of entertainment; but he was fond of Hilary, and on the whole he liked to please her. "It's awfully pretty up here," he even said once.

They were very merry for a while, and then they grew rather silent. The sun, as they rowed, went down in a golden sky, and Hilary began to sing presently in her fresh young voice. When they came back to the landing-place it was almost twilight; the last song had ended a few minutes before. Suddenly, Hilary said, with all her heart upon her lips—

"Oh, boys, when Mr. Hardy comes, try and please Papa."

She made her little quick appeal, and no one answered it; but the boys were rather quiet and

subdued as they all walked home together. Hilary had in general, as I have already said, a vast amount of sympathy with her brothers' views of life; but she was a good deal older than they were, and every now and then, at least, she gave some signs that she was wiser.





CHAPTER II.

MR. HARDY.

IT pleased the young Austins on the following day to take their first view of their tutor from a very elevated perch. They were notable at climbing trees, and they solemnly mounted a large elm that stood a little removed from the entrance gate, and, comfortably lodged there amongst the branches and the sheltering leaves, they waited the approach of the coming man. He would not notice them, they thought, as he drove past; but they were wrong, for he did notice them. He looked up at the tree as he passed, and laughed.

"Who are these lads?" he asked the servant at his side.

"They're the young gentlemen, sir," replied the man.

Upon which, with perfect composure, Mr. Hardy raised his hat to them, and laughed again.

The salutation took the youngsters a little aback. They suddenly felt that their tutor had shown them more courtesy than they had shown to him, and they descended rather rapidly from their lofty position, not altogether pleased with this first appearance that they had made. They were not quite clear about it, but they had a vaguely uncomfortable impression that they had made a mistake, and given Mr. Hardy an advantage over them.

However, if they had fallen into a blunder, it could not be helped now, and—"Anyway, he's a poor-looking chap, I think, and it's not my opinion that it matters much," said Cuthbert, boldly, trying to silence his dissatisfaction with a little bravado.

"He doesn't look as big as Sam," said Bob.

"No; and did you notice his topper?" chimed in Dick. "I daresay it came out of the ark."

There was a back entrance to the house which the boys generally used, and not only did they direct their steps to this back entrance now, but they made a special *détour*, in order to prevent their approach being visible from any of the sitting-room windows. Climbing trees is not an occupa-

tion conducive to order in apparel, and the boys decided unanimously that they had better dedicate a few minutes to their toilet before encountering Mr. Hardy's eyes for the second time.

So they made their entrance into the house at the back door, and bolted up the back staircase; but back staircases, though convenient, not unfrequently at some point debouch on front ones, and so it was in Mr. Austin's house; in consequence of which, as the four lads, running pell-mell, after their usual fashion, burst through a swing door at the back stairs' head, they found themselves suddenly face to face with, and almost falling into the arms of, Mr. Hardy, who at that moment was being conducted by their father to his room.

Of course they fell back with precipitation, but the result of this move was only to put Dick and Harry in peril of their lives, for they barely saved themselves from falling down the stair again up which they had just been leaping, by clutching at the bannisters with the utmost noise of scuffling feet; and they were altogether in disorder, and conscious that their appearance generally was deeply ignominious, when Mr. Austin lent the last blow to their humiliation by addressing them in terms of contempt.

"Boys, can you never behave decently? I am ashamed of you! Do you not know that this is Mr. Hardy?" he exclaimed.

"Oh yes; but this is not our first meeting," Mr. Hardy answered with a sudden short laugh, while the boys only stood shamefaced, and made no answer; and then he looked full at Cuthbert, and—"That was a fine post of observation that you had," he said.

"We hadn't meant you to see us there, sir," Cuthbert answered, bluntly.

"No, you had expected to have all the seeing on your own side," retorted the tutor, and laughed again over his shoulder as he followed Mr. Austin, who had moved on.

"They have been allowed to run utterly wild during these last months. It has been unavoidable perhaps, but I regret it greatly," Mr. Austin said next moment, in a tone of distress.

"They look four fine fellows," was Mr. Hardy's only answer. "That eldest one is a remarkably handsome boy."

"Yes, Cuthbert has a good face. The lad is not a bad lad," said Mr. Austin, half reluctantly; "but his idleness appals me."

"It has not been my experience generally that boys are fond of work," replied the tutor in a

cheerful tone. "I remember in my own case I was idle enough whenever I had the chance."

"Indeed?" replied Mr. Austin, dubiously. "Well, with myself I think I may say without vanity it was wholly different."

"Ah! then you were an exception to the rule," the tutor replied.

It was not until half-an-hour after this that Hilary saw Mr. Hardy, and they met then in the garden. He had come down from his room, and had gone out amongst the flowers, not perhaps quite knowing what else to do with himself, and Hilary was amongst the flowers too.

"Oh, dear me, here he comes, and I don't know what to say to him!" was her first thought as she saw his advancing figure; but after a moment or two she went up to him very demurely, as if she were quite mistress of the situation.

"How do you do?" she said with a little smile.

"How do you do?" he answered.

"What a very nice evening it is," she remarked.

"Yes, a beautiful evening," he assented.

"I really think it is as warm as midsummer," she returned.

"It is warmer than many a midsummer I have known," he said.

And then, these six little sentences having been

exchanged between them, by the time they were uttered, Hilary, with feminine rapidity, began mentally to record her first impressions. "Well, he is not much to look at, but he is a gentleman, and—and I think the boys might be worse off," she said swiftly to herself.

A moment afterwards it was Mr. Hardy who had assumed the initiative.

"I suppose I need hardly ask you if you are Mr. Austin's daughter?" he said. "You are so like one of the boys——"

"Which one do you mean?" Hilary interrupted with interest.

"The eldest. Cuthbert is his name—is it not?"

"Oh yes; people generally think me like Cuthbert, only he is darker than I am. And Dick and Bob are alike. And Harry—I don't think Harry is like anybody."

"I don't know which is which of the three younger ones, but they all seem fine lively little fellows."

"Yes, they are very lively"—laughing. "Papa thinks they make a great deal too much noise."

"I shall not quarrel with them for the noise they make at play if they are quiet when they are at work."

"Oh," cried Hilary, "I am glad you say that."

"I am rather fond of playing and making a noise myself," said the tutor, with a laugh.

"Are you?" asked Hilary, opening her eyes, and wondering in her heart what Cuthbert and the rest would think of such a declaration.

A bell rang at the house a few moments later, and Hilary led her companion into the dining-room.

"You have had rather a long journey, have you not? You are tired perhaps? and I hope you are hungry?" she said to him very simply.

It was a mixed meal to which Mr. Hardy was brought—a high tea, at which all the family were present. The four boys were already in the room when Hilary and Mr. Hardy entered it, and as soon as she had taken her place at one end of the table they tumbled into four seats, two on either side of her, while Mr. Austin, sitting down at the opposite end, invited Mr. Hardy to a chair on his right hand. Evidently the arrangement was one that all the young ones accepted as a matter of course; and presently round Hilary's end of the table there rose a pleasant little buzz of talk, in which the two elders were offered no part. The boys craned their necks towards Hilary, and whispered and laughed, and Hilary too dealt her subdued chatter right and left. The tutor was their

father's charge, not theirs, these young people evidently thought, and so they left their father to entertain him, which he did, after his grave and rather formal fashion. He was a reserved kind of man, who had not much pleasure except in serious conversation ; and he seemed to find Mr. Hardy a sympathetic companion, Hilary thought, as, from her frivolous end of the table, she sometimes looked towards them, and found their two heads nodding to one another in earnest and apparently harmonious talk. "If Papa should like him, it will be very nice. I suppose he is a cultivated man, and knows about books, and about all the sort of things that Papa cares for. It will be very fortunate if he does," thought Hilary to herself.

For this young lady was painfully conscious in her own person of an extreme ignorance of most of the subjects in which her father found his greatest interest, and was well aware that, in almost every respect, she was a very poor companion for him. In fact, Mr. Austin was a man who, while almost morbidly anxious about the education of his sons, scarcely considered the education of his daughter as a matter of any moment at all ; and Hilary, in consequence, since her mother's death, had grown to womanhood much as the flowers grow. Her father had

expected nothing from her in the way of knowledge, and had never even made any proposal to her that she should acquire anything ; and she, on her side, knew that she was ignorant, and in a sort of way regretted it, but yet found life in spite of ignorance so pleasant, that she put off the effort to learn from month to month and from year to year, waiting always for a time to begin, which somehow never came.

But of late, since her father's illness had made him feebler and less self-dependent than of old, she had more than once been troubled because there could be so little companionship between them. "He has nobody to talk to, and it seems so sad," she used to think. "There is not one of us who cares for what he cares for." She used to hover about him sometimes, wishing that she could say something that it would interest him to hear, and yet racking her poor little brains in vain. She would look at the great walls covered with his books that she had never opened nor cared to open, and sigh with a profound sense of the hopelessness of ever attempting to make herself fit to talk to him.

If Mr. Hardy should be able to give him the sympathy that she could not give, would not that be a good thing ? she thought now. She watched

her father's earnest talk at table with cordial satisfaction ; with delight, when the meal was over, she heard Mr. Austin invite the tutor to his study.

"Papa must like him. Don't you think he does ? Won't it be nice if they—if they take to spending their evenings together ?" she exclaimed, the moment the two men had left the room.

"What, and leaving us to ourselves, do you mean ? I say, that *would* be jolly !" cried Cuthbert.

"I am sure he would be more comfortable with Papa than with us," said Hilary, demurely.

"I am sure *we* should be more comfortable without *him*," exclaimed Bob.

"And I do think Papa would like it. I daresay he knows almost as much about books as Papa does himself," added Hilary.

"Oh yes, these old dons always do," cried Dick, who was ten, and who, of course, had had a wide experience of the acquirements of university men.

"Well, he's gone for to-night anyway, I hope," said Cuthbert, complacently.

And (perhaps without quite sufficient foundation for their belief) they all forthwith made up their minds to this, and, having got the table cleared, they chattered merrily for a little while, and then Hilary had just gone to the piano, and begun to

play some lively tunes, and the four boys were laying their heads together over the model of a boat that Cuthbert—who had rather a taste that way—was carving out in wood, and were all offering contrary opinions about some point in dispute, and shouting with a force that almost drowned the sound of Hilary's waltzes—when the door quietly opened, and all at once a silence that scarcely could be said to give a sense of welcome fell upon the room. Hilary's music abruptly ceased; the boys fell back from one another; and Mr. Hardy advanced towards the little group amidst as profound a stillness as might have attended the approach of royalty.

He was probably quite aware of the effect his entrance had produced, but he chose to take no notice of it.

"What have you got there, boys?" he merely said, and sat down at Cuthbert's side, and began to interest himself in the matter in hand as quietly and naturally as he might have done if they had called him into consultation over it.

For a little while the lads were shy, and hung back, leaving Mr. Hardy to do most of the talking; but after a time they found he knew so much about the art of cutting out boats, and he was so pleasant and frank in word and look, that gradually

the four young heads began to stretch themselves forward again, and the four young tongues to wag afresh. The tutor asked questions, and the boys answered them. He gave Cuthbert his advice, and Cuthbert graciously took it. Then presently he began to tell a story to them connected with boat-carving, and this set them all on story-telling ; and the boys found themselves discoursing eloquently to Mr. Hardy about their various successes and mishaps in naval architecture before any of them quite knew how it had come about.

Meanwhile, Hilary had slipped from her music-stool to a chair by the fire, and was sitting there with a book in her hand. She would have been pleased enough to join the others at the table, only she was not quite sure if Mr. Hardy would like it. Perhaps he might object to her presence, as she was not one of his pupils, she thought. So she sat still with her book, and read a little of it, and listened more than she read.

After a good while had passed Mr. Hardy rose from his seat, and came and stood beside her upon the hearth-rug.

"I am sorry that you let me stop your playing when I came in," he said abruptly. "Perhaps I ought not to have come in here at all—but I hardly knew where else to go."

"Oh, of course you were welcome to come if—if you liked," Hilary answered quickly, colouring a little at this address, possibly from a slight prick of conscience. "There is a room for you upstairs, you know—but—oh, this room is always free to everybody," she said.

"Then I need not apologise; only you must let me say again that I am sorry my coming made you stop playing."

"I never play before anybody but the boys," she answered. "You need not regret that I stopped, because I hardly play at all."

"Do you not?" he said. "I am sorry for that."

"Yes, so am I sorry;" and she laughed.

"I should have thought, living quietly here in the country, that you might have a good deal of time for practising."

"Oh yes, I have plenty of time."

"You don't care much for music, then?"

"Yes, I do," rather indignantly.

And then Mr. Hardy said, "Oh!"

It was a sufficiently eloquent "Oh!" and Hilary did not much like it. Hilary knew in her heart that she was very ignorant and very idle, but she did not care to have these facts disagreeably noticed by strangers. Besides, it was no concern of Mr. Hardy's. He was the boys' tutor, not hers.

Hilary Austin, however, was young, and did not quite know yet that silence, when one disapproves, is often more dignified than speech ; so, instead of being silent after Mr. Hardy's last remark, she said after a moment or two, rather in a tone of injured self-defence—

“I suppose you don't believe that I care much, as you say that ? Well, but you are wrong. I care for music—*passionately*. But what is the good of practising if you have nobody to teach you ? No practising will make you know how to play, unless you have a master.”

“Then why don't you get a master ?”

Hilary opened her eyes. This question seemed to her rather an odd one for a stranger to ask, though perhaps in reality she was only embarrassed by it because of circumstances of which Mr. Hardy knew nothing. For it was hardly a very unnatural assumption on his part that the daughter of a man in Mr. Austin's position might have a music-master if she chose. He did not know, as Hilary did herself, how little her education had ever been considered by her father.

“I can't get a master merely by thinking I should like one,” she said, rather quickly, after a moment.

“Can you not ? I should not have thought music-masters were so difficult to procure.”

" But—but Papa would not wish it," hurriedly.

" Oh ! that alters the question, of course."

And then there was a little pause, in the course of which Hilary began to think that perhaps she had been rude to her companion, and silenced him in an abrupt way ; upon which, being very kindly minded, she grew uneasy, and after the silence had lasted for a minute, she broke it rather hastily and deprecatingly.

" I dare say it would be nice to have masters not only for music, but for many things ; but then, you see, Papa does not care about it, so I can't," she said. " Papa does not think that girls need to be taught much."

" You may over-teach them : I quite agree with him there," Mr. Hardy answered instantly. " I don't care a great deal, for my own part, for the new fashion of sending girls to college ; but still I must say if I had daughters of my own I would educate them," he added, with a decision and emphasis that made the colour come to poor little Hilary's face, and a sudden sense of her own uncultivated condition depress and humble her. She made no answer to Mr. Hardy's speech for a moment or two, and then, when she began to speak again at last, she gave a little sigh.

" Yes, I do think girls ought to be taught things.

I can't help thinking it," she said ; " and I know if Mamma had lived——," and then she stopped.

" Did you lose your mother long ago ?" Mr. Hardy asked, after a moment.

" Yes, when I was fourteen."

" And had you never anyone to take her place ?"

" No."

" You and your brothers have all lived here alone together ever since ?"

" Oh yes ; the boys have never been at school, you know."

" And you are their only sister ? You must have your hands full."

" I am afraid I don't do very much for them."

" No ?" with a smile.

" Papa never thinks that I do. He thinks that I only encourage them to be wild."

" Indeed ? And is that true ?"

" I don't know," a little dubiously. " I don't think they are worse than other boys. At least, I hope not."

" But how do you encourage them to be wild ? What do you do ?"

" Oh, you know," a little shamefacedly, " Papa thinks I oughtn't to go with them."

" When they are at play, do you mean ?"

She nodded her head.

" That is what you do, then, is it ? "

" Yes ; sometimes."

" When they are particularly bent on mischief, perhaps ?"

She glanced at him, half disposed to resent his question, but she found him looking so kindly at her that, instead of resenting it, she laughed. Along with her laughter, however, there came a little colour to her face.

" They are never particularly bent on mischief. Papa thinks they are ; but indeed he is wrong. They don't want to do mischief ; they are only fond of fun. I daresay you were fond of fun yourself—once," said Hilary suddenly and severely, with an emphasis on the final word that made something of a twinkle come to the tutor's eyes.

" I believe that is just possible," he replied, gravely. " But it was so long ago, you know ; half-a-century ago, at least."

Hilary looked up hastily, not quite certain for a moment whether Mr. Hardy was speaking in jest.

" It was not anything like half-a-century ago ; I know that quite well," she said the next instant, reprovingly ; " but still you may have forgotten the things you cared for when you were a boy, for all that. Some people forget very fast."

"True," he said ; "and some remember all their lives."

And then there was a pause, and before either of them spoke again, Cuthbert turned his face round from the table.

"I don't seem to be getting this quite right. I wonder if you would mind looking at it for a moment, sir?" he said. And upon that Mr. Hardy went back to his seat by Cuthbert's side, and in a little while Hilary followed too. "I don't suppose he will mind my coming," she thought to herself, half shyly.

Apparently Mr. Hardy did not mind her *coming* in the least ; he seemed to take it, on the contrary, as the most natural thing in the world. And they all continued to talk together with great harmony and extreme volubility until the evening came to an end.





CHAPTER III.

THE BEGINNING OF NEW THINGS.

EXT morning work began, and at nine o'clock, with dull but resigned faces, the four boys presented themselves at their new tutor's desk. They were going to an ordeal from which their souls shrank, but as Englishmen they felt that it behoved them to face it with at least an aspect of dogged courage. So, depressed but resolute, they filed into Mr. Hardy's room, and, Dick being desired to close the door, Hilary, who had attended them in deep sympathy almost to the threshold, heard that movement executed, and then, with a sigh, turned away.

"Poor fellows! they won't like it," she thought. "Only it won't be so bad, I do hope, after a few days as they feel it at first. What a lovely day it

is, though ; and how they would like to be out of doors ! " she said. And all the morning she kept thinking this with a pity for them that, it happily turned out presently, was rather wasted, for when one o'clock came the lads burst from the scene of their labours, and tumbled in their usual headlong fashion downstairs, with faces from which all the solemnity of the early morning hours had got swept away.

" Boys, how did you get on ? Cuthbert, is he nice ? " Hilary questioned eagerly, meeting them, and trying to arrest them for a moment in their flight.

But they were not in a mood to be communicative.

" Oh, it 's all right," Cuthbert merely answered, and bolted past ; and then the other three followed Cuthbert, and Hilary was left to herself.

" They might have told me something ; but at any rate I think it must have been better than they expected," she consoled herself by reflecting. It was quite evident that at least they were not broken in spirit yet.

Later in the day they condescended to give their sister a little more information as to how the morning had passed.

" He 's awfully up to his work," Cuthbert said,

with a shrewd nod of his head. "He beats the Governor all to bits."

"Oh, Cuthbert, does he?" exclaimed Hilary, in a shocked tone.

"Well, I don't mean that he knows more; perhaps he doesn't; but you should see how he pitches it into you! It's splendid."

"Dear me!" said Hilary. "And yet he doesn't look anything very particular."

"Oh, bother looks!" exclaimed Cuthbert. "Though, indeed, as for that, too—I'm not sure, but I think he *does* look something."

"He has an awful pair of eyes. I believe they'd flame up like an eagle's if you made him angry," said Bob, in rather a tone of uneasiness.

"Why, *I* thought he had kind eyes," said Harry, surprised.

"He hadn't when he looked at Bob," exclaimed Dick, the mischief-maker.

"He looked at me just as he did at anybody else," retorted Bob, indignantly. And then Hilary had to interfere and restore the peace.

It was clear that Mr. Hardy had at least produced some impression on his pupils.

"He does teach better than the Governor; I'm certain of it," Cuthbert presently repeated earnestly to his sister. "You see poor old Dad loses his

temper ; and if you lose your temper over anything you do, it stands to reason you can't do it well. But this fellow—why, he's master of his temper and everything else."

"I don't think you can tell that yet," replied Hilary, shaking her head dubiously.

"Well, he makes you feel as if he was, at any rate. I don't know whether he's particularly nice or not; I don't know that I like him particularly; but I'm sure he's an awfully good master. I should just like you to see him teaching."

"I should like it too," said Hilary, with a little sigh.

At that moment it seemed rather hard to her that all power of acquiring knowledge should be given only to the boys.

"You might come in and look on perhaps some day. I daresay he wouldn't mind it," said Cuthbert, kindly.

"Oh no, I shouldn't like to do that, unless he asked me," exclaimed Hilary.

"Well, perhaps he *will* ask you presently."

But Hilary only shook her head. It was not likely he would ever do that, she thought.

Hilary saw hardly anything of Mr. Hardy all this day; but in the evening, a little while before tea, he came into the dining-room, and found her

sitting coiled up on one of the window-seats alone, reading a book that on his approach she rather hastily closed. She first closed the volume, and then she slipped it to one side, and pulled a bit of her gown over it ; and she had just executed this very childish manœuvre, and was wearing in consequence of it a rather bashful and detected look, when he arrived at her side, and spoke to her.

" You have got a very pleasant seat here," he said. " One could hardly wish for a more delightful place to sit and read in."

" No ; it is very nice," she answered, rather shyly.

" Do you read a great deal ?" he asked.

" I ?" she exclaimed. " Oh no ! At least——" and then she hesitated. " I mean—I read my own kind of books ; but you wouldn't like them," she said, blushing, after a moment.

" You must be very shrewd if you have found out already the kind of books I like," he said, with a laugh. " How can you possibly have done that ?"

He looked so composed, and yet so assured, that she blushed deeper than at first.

" I did not mean to say that I had found out anything ; but one may guess things, surely ?" she exclaimed, in her half-impatient, childish way.

"Oh, no doubt. But what is it then that you have guessed?"

"I think you know very well what I mean," she said, still impatiently. "I like novels—and you don't, I suppose."

"Well, but I do," quietly.

"What!—like novels?" in a tone of surprise.

"Yes, and more than that; fairy stories, and all sorts of rubbish."

Hilary's eyes got quite round with surprise.

"I wonder if you are trying to take me in?" she said.

"I am not thinking of taking you in. I am making one of the plainest statements in the world."

"I thought that people like you and Papa" (a quiver of suppressed laughter played round Mr. Hardy's lips, but he said nothing) "never cared for books of that kind."

"Then you made a mistake, you see."

"But Papa doesn't."

"Am I obliged in all respects to be a reflex of Mr. Austin?"

"Oh no—oh, of course not. I only thought——" said Hilary; and then she broke her sentence off.

"You thought, I suppose, that I was too old to indulge in anything so frivolous as novel-reading?"

and then he laughed again. "Well, I am not, you see."

"Then I am very glad."

"And we have at least one common point of interest."

"Yes," answered Hilary, quite gravely.

It was a window looking to the west, and the slanting sunshine began to come into her eyes. She looked very pretty as she sat in the warm light. She was a slight, rather small woman, with tender childish eyes, and a sweet mouth without a fault.

"You must lead rather a lonely life here. What a pity it is you have not a sister," he suddenly said. Perhaps, as he looked at her, it struck him all at once that she was a very solitary little bit of womanhood in this household of men and boys. He looked at her kindly. "I can't think what you do with yourself all day?" he said.

"Oh, I don't do much. I go about the house and the garden, and I play with the boys, and—and I amuse myself in some way," she answered.

"But don't you sometimes get rather tired of all that?"

"Of—doing nothing, do you mean?" and she looked at him half-timidly, yet with a little laugh. "Oh, I don't know. Not often."

"In the long winter days, and at times when the boys are busy, it must be dull for you, surely?"

"I don't think it is. I am used to it. The boys are never away very long at a time."

"And when they are not away, you are always their playfellow, I suppose?"

"Oh yes."

He laughed when she said that, but made no other answer. She was a dainty piece of workmanship, he possibly thought, to be turned to no better use than this. A few moments afterwards she rose from her seat, and as she rose the book that she had hidden in her dress and forgotten fell on the ground, and before she could prevent him, he picked it up. It was a very trashy novel—harmless, but weak as water. He glanced at the title of it, and then threw it down upon the cushion rather contemptuously.

"I hope you usually entertain yourself with better books than this one?" he said.

She flushed up hotly.

"I know it is not very good, but I did not mean you to see it," she hastily answered.

"My seeing it does not matter; but why do you read such poor stuff?"

"How do you know that it is poor stuff?" she asked, with rather a gleam of mischief in her

eyes. "If you know that, you must have read it too."

"Not I!" he answered, scornfully. "I looked into it once for five minutes; that was enough for me."

"Well, but I had nothing else to read," she said, rather humbly.

"Nothing else to read—with some thousands of books in the house to choose from!"

"Yes—but they are Papa's. I never read them, you know."

"May I ask, why not?"

"I couldn't; they are too dull."

"What—all of them? Is Shakspere dull?"

"One can't be reading Shakspere always."

"Have you ever read him much at all?"

"Of course I have!" quickly, but a little uneasily too.

"You would find him rather more entertaining than this book, I should think."

"I daresay I should, but——" and then Hilary hung her head.

She was ashamed, and she was vexed with Mr. Hardy for having made her ashamed. If she read trashy novels, was it her fault, when nobody had ever taught her to care for better things?

"I have been left to do anything I liked since

Mamma died," she said all at once, with a tone in her voice that touched him, and then she looked up into his face. "Of course you can't understand it, but it is so easy to run through a rubbishy book like this, and—and you get into such idle ways," she said, deprecatingly, "when you have no work to do."

"Or when you do none of the work you might," he answered, quietly.

And then the colour came to her face, and she tried to make some hasty reply, but her lip gave a little quiver at the first word ; and the next moment there was a step in the passage, and their talk ended as the servant came in to lay the cloth.

After this conversation, Hilary was shy of Mr. Hardy for a little ; and not only shy of him, but rather depressed altogether. She was very silent during the meal that took place presently, and the boys at her end of the table had most of the talking to themselves ; and when tea was over she sat down demurely near the lamp, with a bit of work in her hand that apparently occupied her whole attention. It was not a very useful piece of work ; she was making a pincushion, without having much need for it, and embroidering it after a pattern of her own invention. It was a pretty trifle enough, but nobody would have been much

the better or the worse if she had either never begun or never should complete it.

The boys brought down their books after tea, and sat with their elbows on the table learning to-morrow's lessons, and they and Hilary had the room to themselves. Hilary wondered if Mr. Hardy had gone to her father's study. "I suppose he has. I hope he has," she thought to herself. She was not exactly angry with Mr. Hardy, but he had hurt her a little; he had humbled her, and nobody likes to be humbled. And yet, as she sat sewing her piece of embroidery, she was very just to him. "He only said what was true, and I suppose, since it was true, I ought not to be vexed at him for saying it," she thought.

The boys addressed a question to her now and then, and presently little Harry got so bewildered over his parsing that she had to sit down by his side and help him with it. She could not parse very well herself, but at least she knew a little more about the matter than Harry did, and so between them they got the work accomplished.

"I hope it's right," Harry said, anxiously, when he had written all the words out, betraying a certain doubt in his tone of the efficiency of his assistant; but Hilary, conscious of her defects, took his want of confidence quite humbly.

"I think it's *pretty* right," she merely said, looking critically over the difficult performance.

They had finished their work before they saw anything more of Mr. Hardy, and when he came into the room at last he gave his attention, at any rate for some time, mainly to Cuthbert and his boat. He sat down by Cuthbert's side, and took the knife out of his hand, and began to chip away at the wood in a masterly manner that awakened great admiration amongst the lads.

It was a good while before he addressed even a word to Hilary. But he did speak to her at last. He got up from his seat and came to her end of the table, and then—

"Miss Austin, what would you say to us having a little reading?" he abruptly asked.

She lifted up her eyes to him at once.

"Oh, I should like it, of course," she said, rather shyly.

"Well, I have got a book here that I daresay you all know——"

"What is it?" interrupted Dick.

Mr. Hardy had brought a small volume out of his pocket. "*Don Quixote*," he said.

"I don't know it," exclaimed Bob, as if he were repelling a charge.

"Oh yes, you used to know it a little, Bob.

Don't you remember," said Hilary, "there is an extract from it in that book of extracts that we used to have long ago—a funny bit about Sancho Panza."

"Oh yes, I recollect *that*," cried Bob.

And then it seemed that they all recollected this passage; but Cuthbert shook his head when Mr. Hardy asked if they knew any more of the book than that, and Hilary rather shamefacedly answered, "No." She felt humbled again when she had to say "No," but yet she could not help saying it.

Mr. Hardy read for nearly an hour, and the young ones laughed, and decidedly enjoyed the reading. It was very nice; Hilary thought, as she sat making her silken flowers. She said "Thank you" very cordially when Mr. Hardy closed the volume.

"I think it is very kind of you to read to us," she told him simply, a few minutes afterwards, coming voluntarily near to him as he was standing alone before the fire.

"Oh, I am fond of reading aloud," he answered, readily.

"But we are so ignorant," she said.

"Well, that makes a good reason why you should be read to—does it not?" he asked.

"Yes, but it can't be any pleasure to *you*."

"Perhaps you are not a competent judge of that."

He looked at her as he spoke with a friendly laugh; but she had something on her mind: the poor little childish heart was burdened with a confession that it desired to make, and she did not return his laughter.

"I wanted to say something to you," she began suddenly in an embarrassed way, turning her back upon the boys and flushing red. "You know we were talking before tea about reading, and I was ashamed at you finding out how little I knew about anything, and I tried to hide it by speaking as if I had read a great deal of Shakspere; but I want to tell you that I haven't—I have only read a few of the plays. I think I ought to tell you, for I am so sorry for what I said."

"My dear Miss Austin, if you think that what you said left me with any impression that you knew much about Shakspere, pray do not distress yourself," answered Mr. Hardy, emphatically, "for it did not do so in the least degree."

He made this response quickly, and almost in a tone as if he enjoyed making it; but a moment after, he turned to her with a pleasant and even a kindly smile.

"You don't know much about Shakspere yet—

but what of that?" he said. " You have plenty of time to learn. We can read Shakspere sometimes in the evenings, if you like. What do you say? Do you think you should care about it?"

"Oh yes," she said.

"Well, so would the boys, I daresay; or we can try if they would, at any rate."

"It will be very kind of you. It will be very kind indeed; but I am almost afraid——" Hilary said, and then stopped.

"What are you afraid of?" he asked.

"That we ought not to let you do it. It seems too much—to expect you to spend your evenings in such a way."

"What, as in reading Shakspere?" he asked.

And then she was obliged to laugh. But though she laughed, she looked grave again after a moment.

"You *know* it is a good-natured thing to propose to do," she persisted, "when we are all such children; for even I—I am hardly more than a child."

"Well, so much the better. I am always happy when I am with children."

On which Hilary looked at him a little doubtfully, and after a moment turned away. His ready acceptance of her declaration that she was a child

was perhaps a little embarrassing to her ; for Hilary was eighteen, and though in knowledge she might with perfect justice describe herself as being in a state of infancy, in other ways she was not unconscious of her dawning womanhood. But, as she did not quite know how to reply to Mr. Hardy's last speech, she took the wise refuge of remaining silent ; and in a few moments more some of the boys came up and joined them, and then soon after they bade one another good-night.





C H A P T E R I V.

MASTER AND PUPILS.

MR. HARDY had made Hilary a little shy of him in one direction, but it is not to be supposed that, because she was shy of him when their conversation approached the subject of books, she was equally diffident when they conversed of other matters. The truth indeed was not so by any means. There were subjects upon which she perhaps knew more than Mr. Hardy did, and, girl-like, as the days went on, and she gradually discovered what these subjects were, she availed herself to the utmost of any small advantages of this kind that she possessed, and was quite ready, with the smallest amount of reason, to assume a tone of superiority over him.

For instance, Mr. Hardy was a man who for the most part had passed his life in towns, and who,

although he loved the country, had no minute knowledge of common country things. Such knowledge as he had at all in that direction was rather of a lofty kind. He could tell Hilary much about the stars, a good deal about clouds, more than she cared to hear of geological formations ; he could even delight her by dissecting a flower or leaf, and showing her the wonderful arrangement of its petals or its fibres ; but the girl who knew nothing about all these higher or subtler matters was able (to her delight) to puzzle him utterly by taking him into the nearest wood or glade, and catechising him as to the trees that grew around them, and the birds that sang above their heads.

Of course, as may be supposed, it was not in a moment that Hilary discovered Mr. Hardy's ignorance concerning these things. Knowing them familiarly herself, and having known them so long that she could not remember when she had first begun to learn them, it never occurred to her to conceive at first that a man so deeply imbued with knowledge as Mr. Hardy could be ignorant of such common matters ; the delightful discovery only dawned upon her when one day, about a week after his arrival, he amazed her by remarking in a tone of surprise—

"Surely it is unusually late in the year for cuckoos?"

"Oh yes; you never hear them after June," she replied.

"So I thought," he said; "but I am certain I heard one this morning."

And then she gave an astonished look at him, and broke into a laugh.

"You heard the cuckoo clock," she said. "It was set going to-day."

"Was that it?" he exclaimed, looking surprised.
"Dear me! it is very pretty."

"Do you think so?" said Hilary, rather contemptuously. "I don't care for those sort of things. But the children used to like it," she added; "and I believe Harry likes it still."

"Then Harry and I will listen to it together," replied Mr. Hardy, quite unabashed. "Have you any nightingales here?" he asked next moment.

"Nightingales? Oh yes, I should hope so," exclaimed Hilary, joyfully.

"Only, I suppose, *they* are not singing either at present?"

She looked again at Mr. Hardy for a moment, to see if he was speaking seriously; then—

"Do you know nothing about birds at all?" she asked, solemnly.

"Very little, I am afraid," he answered, laughing at her astonished face.

"Did you ever hear a nightingale sing at this time of year?"

"I regret to say I may have heard hundreds, and not have been the least the wiser for it."

"Do you mean by that, that you should not have known?" exclaimed Hilary.

"Precisely," he replied.

"You would not have known a nightingale from a blackbird or a thrush?"

"My dear Miss Austin, except the cuckoo's, there is not one bird's note I know from another."

"Well, I would not have believed that!" said Hilary.

"I am afraid I have fallen very much in your estimation, but you see the truth was sure to come out sooner or later."

"But if you don't know, you ought to learn," said Hilary, severely. "I should be dreadfully sorry if I did not know about birds' songs. It seems so odd," said this conceited little maiden, beginning at once to plume herself with instinctive vanity on her one small piece of knowledge.

"It doesn't seem so particularly odd to *me*," said Mr. Hardy, coolly. "I have never lived much in

the country. There are thousands of things one does not get time to learn."

"But a common thing like this!" exclaimed Hilary. And then she could not contain her delight any longer. "Well, I *am* glad to know something that you don't!" she said.

"That shows a very bad disposition on your part. I thought you would have been sorry for me," he answered.

"Oh, I am sorry too," she said, a little ashamed of herself, and coming down a note or two. "Only"—and then she hesitated a little—"when one does not know almost anything, and somebody else is always finding that out, it is very nice, even in a little thing, to be able to turn round upon—that other person. Don't you understand?" she said, and looked up laughingly into his face with her childish eyes. "I don't want to *keep* you ignorant about birds, you know, though I do like to see that you are ignorant now. I will teach you everything I know, if you like."

"Well, if you will take the trouble to do that, I can do no less than try my best to learn."

"Oh, I shall like to do it extremely. Only, you know, there won't be much that we can do till spring; there are so few birds that are singing now. But, to be sure, that may be an advantage

on the whole. You might find it confusing at first if there were many."

"No doubt of it. The fewer the better," replied Mr. Hardy, fervently.

And, indeed, when Hilary began her lessons presently, she soon became of Mr. Hardy's opinion, for, to tell the truth, he did not (to her extreme amazement) prove an apt pupil. She had begun by this time to have a great respect both for Mr. Hardy's natural powers of mind and for the extent of his acquirements, but, as these days went on, the lamentable blunders into which he fell in trying to master the first rudiments of the art in which she had volunteered to instruct him filled her sometimes with astonishment. "I think there must be something wrong with your ears," she told him at last one day, out of the depths of her surprise. "I do think there must, for you don't seem to recognise the same note, though you hear it fifty times." But, both at his own mistakes and at the effect that they produced on Hilary, Mr. Hardy, for his part, only laughed.

In another branch of learning, however, under Hilary's instruction, he made a decidedly more rapid advance.

"That is a splendid tree you have there on the lawn," he said to her one day, as they happened to

be standing together at one of the drawing-room windows. "A—a lime, isn't it?"

"A lime?" repeated Hilary.

"Is it not a lime? I thought it was."

"A lime, with leaves of that colour? It's a beech," said Hilary.

"Oh, is it? I did not know." But he said this very carelessly.

"Do you mean that you don't know limes from beeches, generally?"

And then he laughed, and looked rather caught.

"I daresay I do, but I am not quite sure about it," he said. "I think I know oaks."

"You only *think* you do?"

"Well, I am pretty sure; and birches, I believe."

She stood without speaking for a moment or two, and then she looked at him gravely.

"Do you mean that you are short-sighted?" she said.

"Short-sighted! No; not in the least," he exclaimed.

"And yet you don't know different trees from one another?"

"Well, you see I don't."

"Dear me; I *am* surprised! Why, even Harry could tell you the name of any tree you liked to ask him."

"Then Harry is vastly my superior in that respect; for, if the operation were reversed, he would soon put *me* to sad confusion."

"I do like to find you out in something you don't know," said Hilary, with sudden, half-repressed glee. "When you came first I thought you knew everything, and I was dreadfully afraid of you; but I begin to doubt now," she said, putting on a demure look—though, if she had raised her eyes, you might have seen a gleam of mischief in them—"whether you are so much wiser, after all, than other people."

"The only wonder is that you didn't doubt that a fortnight ago," he answered, coolly.

"Well, but you seemed so very much then as if you knew more than anybody else. I thought you were one of the people in whom one would never be able to find a weak place anywhere. As far as knowledge goes, I mean," added Hilary, maliciously.

"And (even with that reservation) you find out now that you were wrong?"

"Yes, I begin to think so."

But she laughed as she spoke, and suddenly looked up into his face with eyes that were quite sweet enough to make him forgive her saucy answer.

After this, I am forced to record that it became Hilary's delight to put Mr. Hardy to shame by dragging forward the various ignorances that she had discovered in him, and publicly mocking at them. She proclaimed them without pity to the boys, and incited these gentle spirits to point the finger of scorn at him, which they did with a will, pelting him with questions from the store-houses of their young knowledge to which he could give at best only the lamest answers, and could most often give no answers at all.

But all their gibes seemed to fall blunted on the tutor's placid temper. He laughed along with them at himself with perfect readiness ; he replied to their thrusts not unfrequently with counter thrusts (dealt with a weapon for the most part made of a good deal keener steel than theirs) ; he bore even their practical jokes—and they indulged in these—with an undisturbed equanimity. Up to a certain point he let them treat him with what freedom they pleased ; beyond that point he gave them once one lesson not to go, and they showed their comprehension of it, and their wisdom, by never needing to receive a second.

It was on one afternoon when they had all been out together—the four boys and Hilary, for she often joined them in their walks. The woods were

rich at this time with their autumnal colours, and on this special day—for the wind was high—the leaves were falling in a golden and crimson shower. Hilary was full of delight. “Is it not beautiful?” she kept exclaiming. She appealed to Mr. Hardy sometimes, but always in a way as if she were doubtful of his sympathy.

“Now is not this lovelier than anything you can see in any town?” she exclaimed once, in a challenging tone.

“It is quite *unlike* anything you can see in any town—but why make comparisons?” he answered.

“Because I don’t think you really care for country things. You have never lived in the country, and you know so little about it.”

“Well—and you have never lived in towns, and you know so little about *them*.”

“But they are hideous—most of them.”

“Such as Venice, for instance, or Verona.”

“Oh, you are talking of Italy; but Italy is not England.”

“I am talking of towns that are beautiful. It doesn’t matter where they are. Your assertion is that this wood is more beautiful than any town. I reply that this wood and a fine town are two things that cannot be compared. And, besides, you speak in a state of ignorance, for I believe you

have scarcely ever seen a noble building, to say nothing of a whole noble city, in your life."

Upon which Hilary, feeling that she was getting the worst of the argument, lost her temper a little.

"Well, you may talk that way if you like," she said, quickly, "but somebody—as wise as you are at any rate—has said that 'God made the country, but man made the town.'"

"Yes; and who made man?" asked Mr. Hardy.

And then, as Hilary glanced at him, a little puzzled, and not quite understanding the retort, he gave a laugh.

"It is very tempting to launch a saying of that kind at one's head; but you don't really believe that it proves anything, do you?" he said next moment. "If I wanted to argue on the other side, I might as well exclaim, 'God made a daisy, and man wrote *Paradise Lost*;' or, 'God made those worms beneath your feet, and Raphael painted angels.' The thing takes your fancy with its sound, but that is all. If you fall to reasoning on it, it won't hold water."

Hilary bit her lip, and made no answer. She did not like to be put down by Mr. Hardy, but she had a wholesome conviction of her own weakness in a good many directions, and was wise enough

generally to withdraw pretty quickly from a fight in which she perceived that her enemy's hand held stronger weapons than her own. To tell the truth, Mr. Hardy was often to poor Hilary a troublesome person to argue with, for at no time did she feel her general ignorance and childishness more keenly than when she attempted to enter on discussions with him; especially, too, as she was terribly afraid of compromising herself, and permitting more than was inevitable to be seen of the barrenness and uncultivated condition of her mind.

So she held her tongue for a few moments, and presently he began to talk to her in what to her thinking was a far more pleasant way, and they were conversing very harmoniously, when, after ten minutes, the boys, who had been lagging for a time behind, busy with some special interests of their own, came up at a canter, and of course at once took possession of the field.

"I say, Mr. Hardy, let's have some races," cried Bob.

"It seems to me that you have been racing already," replied Mr. Hardy, "for you look as red as a turkey-cock."

But Bob declared that what Mr. Hardy referred to was only the natural brilliancy of his complexion; and as the other three proceeded next

moment to join in their brother's request, Mr. Hardy acceded to it, and the races were had accordingly.

They ran upon an open piece of sward about a hundred yards in length, and the two first races the boys ran alone, and Dick won them both ; but in the third race Mr. Hardy joined them, and beat them all, which did not quite please Dick, and he forthwith became a little crusty. The boy was a good runner, and would have liked to outdo his tutor.

"Try a walking match," he called out. "See if I don't beat you all at that."

So they tried a walking match, but before they were half over the ground Mr. Hardy said coolly to Dick, who had got ahead, " You're running, Dick."

" I'm not," retorted Dick, panting and savage ; but nevertheless he slackened his pace for a few moments, till he felt his tutor's shoulder level with his own. Then his ardour carried him away afresh, and once more came the warning voice behind him—

" You're running again, Dick."

" That's a lie !" cried the boy furiously, beside himself with excitement.

The next moment he felt a grip upon him, and,

though he tried to wrench himself from it, he was brought to a standstill; he found himself pinioned—wheeled from his place—rendered helpless.

"My lad, you have forgotten yourself," Mr. Hardy merely said, in a perfectly quiet voice; and then with one sudden sinewy movement he sent Dick spinning, and in two seconds afterwards the boy was lying sprawling in a bed of furze and bracken.

There Mr. Hardy left him. "Come on, boys," he said curtly to the other three; and they followed him without another word. Only Hilary lingered, and, looking rather white and startled, showed an inclination to move to the assistance of the fallen hero. But Mr. Hardy saw her intention, and at once arrested it, with a coolness which, when the time had passed, she wondered she had submitted to.

"He is not hurt; leave him alone," he said, shortly. "You will oblige me, Miss Austin, by leaving him alone."

And then Hilary too turned away, and reluctantly left Dick to himself.

They had not a very pleasant walk home after this, for Mr. Hardy spoke little, and the other four spoke less. During the remainder of the day Dick sulked. The other boys, too, continued a

little more shy of their tutor than usual, and Hilary was thoughtful. But the next morning Mr. Hardy took Dick alone, and said a few words to him ; and then after that the cloud passed, and left nothing behind it but a memory that bore wholesome fruit.

In fact—though they had learnt (much to their advantage) that Mr. Hardy was a man who, on occasion, could very well hold his own—as the weeks went on, these four lads, in different degrees, grew to like their tutor more than they feared him. That they did fear him in a measure was true, for he ruled them in lesson hours with a tight hand ; but it was a kind of fear that was very salutary for them. They worked, after he came, better than they had ever worked before ; and though Dick grumbled audibly, and Bob and Harry gave vent now and then to murmurs of discontent, still the labour exacted from them was got done, and got done, too, fairly well ; while as for Cuthbert, the boy entirely turned over a new leaf. He was an impressionable lad, and he took a liking to Mr. Hardy, which in a very short time grew into an ardent boyish enthusiasm. The other three gave their tutor a moderate and commonplace regard, obeying him because they found he was strong enough to enforce obedience ; respecting him

almost unconsciously, and without enquiring why; having a certain satisfaction in being with him out of school hours, because of his ready wit, and his pleasant temper, and his power (which they felt without arguing about it) of adapting himself to their boyish tastes and ways; but the feeling that he came to arouse in Cuthbert was something different from this. The boy looked up to him as he had never yet looked up to anyone. He had faculty enough, and a good power of work in him (though until now he had never worked), and Mr. Hardy roused his ambition, and sent him to his books with, for the first time, a feeling of appetite for them. The tutor and the pupil came rapidly by degrees to suit one another excellently: on the one side there was unquestioning faith and admiration; on the other, capacity and self-control, and a great power of giving and winning sympathy.

Of course, as was only natural, the other boys after a time began to make jokes at Cuthbert for his hero-worship, and, on the whole, rather to laugh at him; and even Hilary now and then would laugh too. Like other young and ardent disciples, Cuthbert was rather disposed to bore his brothers and sister by the warmth of his partanship. It by no means suited them (as it did him) to have Mr. Hardy set up as a permanent referee

in all discussions—to have his judgments treated as decrees against which there could be no appeal.

“ If Mr. Hardy said that black was white, you would expect all the rest of us to agree with him,” Hilary exclaimed, in a little outburst of half-jesting impatience, one day. “ Mr. Hardy knows a great many things, no doubt ; but really, Cuthbert, it is too much to suppose, now that he is here, that none of us is ever to have an opinion of our own.”

“ I don’t think it likely that your opinions could be worth much compared with his,” Cuthbert answered contemptuously to this address. “ Of course you can hold any opinions you like—nobody can prevent that ; but if they’re different from Mr. Hardy’s,” said this thoroughgoing follower, coolly, “ the chances are, I should say, that they are wrong.”

“ Now really, Cuthbert !” cried Hilary, with her face getting a-flame.

“ Well, I only tell you what is the truth—what anybody would say. What can *you* know about things ? You’ve never taken the trouble to think out anything, like him—and you haven’t got the brains to do it either. I don’t mean, you know,” added Cuthbert, hastily, a little ashamed perhaps of the rudeness of these last words, “ that you’re

not clever enough in your own way ; I only mean to say that you can't *think* like Mr. Hardy, and I'll stand to that. You can't."

"One may be right sometimes without much thinking," retorted Hilary, shrewdly. "You seem to me to be getting it into your head that logic and reason are to determine everything."

"Well, so they are," said Cuthbert, rashly.

"We should be delightful people if we were always to be guided by reason and logic, and nothing else !" cried Hilary, "if we had no feelings and no instincts !"

"Oh, bother instincts !" exclaimed Cuthbert, scornfully.

But he had a shadowy consciousness at this moment that his convictions were perhaps a little ahead of his knowledge, and that it might be more prudent, in case of accidents, not to carry the discussion further. So he turned on his heel with a movement of impatience.

"I can't stop now and argue it out," he said. "I'm right—that I'm certain ; but if you want to hear all about it, you had better talk to Mr. Hardy. *He'll* set you right," said Cuthbert, confidently, and went out of the room, leaving Hilary rather ruffled.

"*He* set me right ! Well, Cuthbert does make a

goose of himself!" she exclaimed, indignantly, as the door closed, and for a few moments she felt very hot and scornful; but presently, after a minute had passed, she began to laugh at her impatience.

"It is very absurd, certainly; but, after all, it is nice to see him like Mr. Hardy so much," she allowed, frankly. "He never had this sort of feeling before for anybody. I wish he wouldn't be so terribly arrogant, and take up Mr. Hardy's opinions without understanding them; but I suppose one must take the good along with the bad, and—and not lose one's temper over it. Such things, though, as he does say! It's no wonder they make one hot!" exclaimed Hilary; and had much ado to keep from ruffling her feathers again.

She had such encounters as this occasionally with her brother, but yet, on the whole, as she said, she was not sorry to see the boy's admiration for his tutor. She rather envied the new-born ardour with which he went to his books. She often thought, when she saw the master and the pupil together, that it must be pleasant for Cuthbert. For Mr. Hardy, on his side, was very good to the lad; he would often help him with his work out of lesson hours, and would take him out to

walk, and talk with him ; he had kindled a spark of ambition in the boy's heart, and he kept it alive and fanned it with his quick and ready sympathy.

"I am the only one of you who knows what Mr. Hardy is," said Cuthbert, defiantly, one day when he was engaged in one of the battles into which his rash discipleship was so often plunging him. "You others think you know him, and you don't ; not one of you—not even Hilary," cried Cuthbert, with scorn, "though she thinks she is so wise."

And when the boy said this, Hilary, although she was in the room, and rather angry, held her tongue.

"He need not have said that to me. If I had been in his place, I don't think I would have sneered at *him*," she only thought to herself after a few moments had passed.





CHAPTER V.

POOR LITTLE HILARY.

MR. HARDY had not let his proposal of reading to the young people in the evenings be forgotten. He seldom failed to join them when the time for learning lessons was over, and he generally brought some book with him, with which he would entertain them for an hour or so. He gave them both prose and verse. Sometimes, as on the first night, it was a chapter or two of *Don Quixote*; sometimes it was part of a play of Shakspere, and occasionally some old ballads, or a canto of Scott, or a book of the *Iliad*. Cuthbert would sit at his wood-carving while he read, and the other boys would amuse themselves idly and not quite noiselessly with their slates, and Hilary would go on weaving her silken patterns; but often the young fingers ceased from their work, and two

earnest pairs of eyes at least fixed themselves, as he read, on Mr. Hardy's face.

It was Cuthbert and Hilary who liked these evening readings most, though the others accepted them with resignation, and even at times bestowed upon them a measure of attention. There were occasionally points in the stories to which Bob and Dick and Harry cared to listen, and incidents at which they laughed ; and, for the rest, when the reading was dull, they could turn their thoughts to other things. A surreptitious game at noughts and crosses was even possible at times when weariness threatened to become oppressive.

But Hilary and Cuthbert used to listen with enjoyment. What Mr. Hardy read was, for the most part, new to them, for they had had little acquaintance till now with any other books than school-books. They had lived with thousands of others round them all their lives, and yet had never been roused or tempted to read almost one of them. To Cuthbert hitherto, indeed, reading of any kind had hardly ever come under the aspect of a pleasure ; to Hilary, under such aspect, no reading had come but that of novels. Mr. Austin had never attempted to give, and had probably never even thought of giving, his daughter a taste for literature ; to his sons, with much pain and

mental disturbance, he had indeed tried to give a taste for Greek and Latin ; but for this end he had laboured in vain, and, baffled in his work of laying the foundations, he had never made one effort to raise the superstructure. He was too orthodox a student, and too stiff in his views, for that. So Cuthbert, though he was fourteen, listened during this winter to "The Tale of Troy" for the first time, and to many another tale and legend, till his tardy imagination took fire, and a hitherto dormant love for "the pleasant paths of literature" sprang keenly up in him.

It was a new world into which he was brought, and Mr. Hardy's was the hand that had opened it for him. Before more than two or three months had passed the lad began to pore in private over his new-found treasures, and he and Mr. Hardy would talk together about them, the man and boy holding long conversations with one another, in which none of the others took any part. Sometimes, perhaps, Hilary thought it a little hard, though she said nothing. She was beginning at moments, as these months passed on, to have her little pangs of jealousy. Did Mr. Hardy think that Cuthbert was the only one amongst them who had any understanding or any feeling ? she sometimes thought.

"He despises me, I suppose, because I know so little," she used to say to herself; and sometimes she said it sadly, and sometimes rather with indignation.

Mr. Hardy, indeed, as time went on, did not on the whole take a great deal of notice of Hilary. They were seldom together except when the boys were present, and very seldom had any talk with one another. She used to jest and laugh with him sometimes, and he was always ready to meet her on her own terms, and give her back her laughter; but of serious talk they had almost none, and sometimes this used to vex Hilary, and sometimes it made her angry; though she would not show him that she was angry, unless he guessed it, perhaps, when she flung now and then some sharp word at him. Only, if he guessed it, she could not tell, for he had both a face and a temper not given to betray themselves. When Hilary let fly her little shafts at him, he generally made her feel as if he were clothed in a coat of mail that was quite impervious to such feeble darts. They touched him, but they drew no blood; he would only laugh at them, and shake them off him.

It was trying to the poor little girl sometimes, for, to tell the truth, she would have liked to be thought as much of by Mr. Hardy as Cuthbert was.

She had her own share of vanity, and it did not seem to her that her brother's deserts were so much greater than her own. He was grateful to Mr. Hardy—well, so was she ; he cared for those books that Mr. Hardy read to them—but did not she care for them too?—was she more ignorant than he was?—was she more stupid even, that he should talk so much to Cuthbert, and not at all to her?

She went one day to the little bookcase in her room that contained her old childish lesson-books, and took down one or two of them, with a wistful wondering whether it would do her any good if she began to study them afresh. She had forgotten more than half the little knowledge she ever had. She began to turn the pages of her old thumbed histories. “Perhaps if I went over them again now they would teach me something,” she said.

She took one book presently, and went down to the dining-room with it, and read it for an hour. It was like a return to years long gone. The old volume, with its worn leaves, recalled her childish days to her ; the kind days when her mother had taught her, and she had had no bitter thoughts and heart-burnings. She read her little history diligently for an hour, trying to arouse herself to feel some interest in it ; but the utmost interest that she could kindle was very faint. The book

was too slight and juvenile to take any hold on her. She had been a child when she had read it last, and she was a woman now; and she grew tired when the hour had ended, and shut the volume with a sigh.

The maid had come in to lay the cloth for dinner; after a little while the first dinner bell rang. Hilary was sad, and tired of her own company. "Shall I go up and tell the boys to get themselves ready?" she thought to herself. They were lads with ideas not yet defined on the subject of punctuality, and Hilary was in the habit not unfrequently of putting in her head at the schoolroom door, to remind them that the time for hand-washing and hair-brushing had arrived. Not indeed that her reminders were much needed in these days, for Mr. Hardy was a man who took account of bells, and the boys, to tell the truth, were generally on their feet before Hilary appeared to hasten them with her warning voice; but still she was a social little maid, and at the end of her lonely mornings she used to be rather pleased to make this rapid visit to the schoolroom, and take a momentary glance at what its occupants were about. Only of late she had grown a little shy of going often, and to-day, when she had run upstairs, and had got her hand upon the door, for

a moment she paused and hesitated before she opened it. A feeling came to her suddenly that she might as well go back again, for that nobody wanted her there—not even Cuthbert, nor Mr. Hardy.

But still, after that temporary hesitation, she went in.

"Boys," she said, standing on the threshold, "you have only five minutes; are you remembering?"

"Oh yes—all right," answered Cuthbert, hastily.

Cuthbert was busy with one of his books by Mr. Hardy's side; master and pupil had their heads both bent over one page, and neither head moved as Hilary spoke. The only one in the room who took any notice of her was Harry, who, as he was piling up his books, called to her to look at the long sum he had done.

"Look; it runs all the way down the slate and up here again; isn't it a length?" he said.

"And has it come all right?" asked Hilary, properly impressed.

"I should think it had!" replied Harry, with scorn.

Hilary went to the fire, and began to mend it. After a minute Cuthbert said, "Thank you, sir," and closed his book; and then Mr. Hardy rose.

"Don't make the fire very large," he said to Hilary. "Give me the poker;" and he took it from her hand. "It is so mild to-day that we hardly need a fire at all."

"That is only because the sun comes in here," she answered; "it has been chilly enough downstairs."

"Why, yes, you *look* chilly," he replied at once. "Have you not been out this morning?"

"No," she said.

"That is a pity. What has kept you in?"

"Nothing"—a little despondently.

"But you have not been doing nothing, have you?" he asked, with a laugh.

And then she did not answer for a moment or two, only her mouth gave a little childish droop.

"I have been reading," she said shortly, after that brief silence.

"What, one of your novels?"

"No."

"What, then?"

"Oh, never mind. Something I wanted to read."

"I am afraid it was not anything very interesting?"

A shake of the head, without any other response.

"What was it?" a second time, with rather a look of amusement, which, however, as her eyes were inclined downwards, Hilary fortunately did not see.

"Oh, it was nothing but—an old book of mine."

"But if it was so dull a book, why did you go on reading it?"

"I didn't say it was dull—exactly. I daresay it was my own fault. It was only"—And then Hilary paused, and suddenly looked up at him rather wistfully. "I was trying to read a little history," she said; "that was all."

"Why did you do that by yourself?" he asked at once. A very kindly look came into his face. "I should like you to show me your book."

But she coloured, and shook her head.

"Oh, it was only a child's book; you wouldn't care," she said.

"Was it because it was a child's book that you found it so dull?"

"I don't know."

"I don't think you would find all histories dull. If I were to choose one for you, I would engage to make you find it interesting."

"Yes, but I don't think"—and then she stopped.

"What don't you think?"

"That"—faltering a little—"you would care to take the trouble."

"There is the second bell," he said.

He made no other answer, but, turning away, began to gather up some papers from the table; the boys had retreated a few minutes before; and Hilary, with her heart beating a little quickly, turned too and left the room. As she went away, she wished that she had left that last sentence unspoken; she was vexed with herself that the words had escaped her lips; he had urged her to say them, but yet now she felt ashamed, as if in saying them she had compromised her dignity. She was sore, and she had let her soreness become visible, and he could only interpret what she had said as a complaint.

Hilary was very shy of Mr. Hardy as they sat at dinner; she hardly spoke to him, and when the meal was ended she went out of the room at once, instead of lingering with the other young ones, as was her custom generally; nor indeed during the remainder of the day did she almost let him exchange a word with her. "He may think that I want help from him, but he shall see that he is wrong," she told herself a dozen times over, working herself up into something that was almost a state of anger against him, though in truth the

poor man had by no means deserved her anger. But she had said what she was annoyed with herself for saying, and so she revenged herself on him for what was in reality no fault of his at all.

She was very shy of him still when he came and joined them for their evening reading. He read the "Taming of the Shrew" to them, and, while the boys roared with delight at Petruchio's wooing, poor little Hilary chose to take the matter quite seriously, and expressed her scorn so bitterly, that even Mr. Hardy laughed at her. She would not be amused and see the fun of it, like the other four. For her to-night Shakspere was no more than an unmannerly jester, and Katherine and Petruchio a pair of puppets in a farce. The world for this moment, to Hilary, had got a little out of joint.

Mr. Hardy and she had no further talk together this evening upon the subject of her history reading, nor indeed upon any other subject; but the next morning, when he came down to breakfast, he found her in the dining-room alone, and without any beating about the bush, he then frankly said a few words to her.

"You were speaking yesterday about reading history," he began, almost before he had been a minute in the room; "but the dinner bell, you

know, interrupted us. What was it you meant when you made that remark about my not caring to give you any help? If you only spoke in jest, then of course what you said needs no explanation; but otherwise, it was a very petulant thing to say—was it not? and not a true one, I think?"

Hilary's cheeks got very hot while Mr. Hardy was speaking in this way to her; he was looking full at her too, and that made them flush the faster; but she was not a coward, so she summoned what courage she could to her aid, and answered him, when he had finished, pretty steadily.

"I said what I had no business to say," she replied; "but when I spoke I was tired and stupid." And then, after a moment, she added simply—"I have been very vexed about it."

"Because you did me injustice, do you mean?"

But at this she shook her head quickly.

"No—but because what I said sounded as if I was complaining."

"Then do you think that it was true?"

She was silent for a moment, and then she said, "Yes."

"That I would not take the trouble to give you any help?"

"Ye—es."

"What has made you think that?"

And then her lip quivered a little, and she gave him no answer.

"Miss Hilary, I don't think you are treating me very kindly."

She looked at him, rather disturbed, but said nothing.

"I don't think I have given you any reason to pass so unfair a judgment upon me."

A little pause, but still no reply from her.

"If I tell you that what you said yesterday is untrue, will you believe me?"

"I wish you wouldn't take any more notice of it," she exclaimed, suddenly and sharply. "I had no business to say what I did, and it was very stupid of me; but I wish you would let it alone now."

"Suppose you answer my question first," he said. "Will you believe me when I tell you that what you said yesterday is untrue?"

"Of course I must believe it, if you say it is." But she spoke very reluctantly.

"It is so entirely the reverse of the truth, that I have often had it in my mind to propose to give you some help of the sort you were speaking of—only I doubted if you would accept it; and I was unwilling to risk the chance of having my offer thrown in my face, you know."

He said the last words with a little laughter on his lips, and the words and the laughter together made her flush hotter than she had done yet.

"Oh, how can you say that? How could you think I would do that?" she exclaimed.

"I was only speaking in jest," he answered.

"But you shouldn't jest—in that way."

"Then you shouldn't tempt me to jest. The fault is more yours than mine. Where is that book that you were reading yesterday? Show it to me."

She had hidden it away in the drawer of a table at the farther end of the room. When he made his request, she did not accede to it at once: she gave him a hesitating glance; she did not move for a few moments; but finally she went, without speaking a word, and brought him the little volume. Or at least she came with it near to where he was standing, but she did not give it to him; she only passively let him take it out of her hand.

He opened it and glanced at the title-page, and for a moment he had some ado to keep from laughing; but yet his face was very kindly when, after a little pause, he turned it again to her.

"You ought not to sit down here by yourself," he said, "trying to read childish lesson-books like

this. No wonder you find it dull. If you really want to read any history, why don't you come upstairs with the boys?"

"Upstairs to the schoolroom?" she exclaimed, opening her eyes wide.

"You need not come for the whole morning, if you think that would be too much; but why not come for an hour or two—for just as long as you like?"

"But—I should disturb you"—hesitatingly.

"Why? Can't you sit still?"

"Oh, I don't mean that!" indignantly. "I only mean that—my coming, I think, would put you out."

"In what way? I am afraid you are giving me credit for being more sensitive than I am."

"I am not thinking of you being sensitive"—still very scornfully; "but surely it is only reasonable to suppose that if, when you are with your pupils, somebody else who was not a pupil should come and sit in the room, it might be unpleasant to you?"

"Then consider yourself as a pupil too, and the difficulty vanishes."

"Oh, but Mr. Hardy —!"

"Could you not condescend to do that?"

He put his question with a laugh, but she did

not give him back his laughter ; her face gave signs of more emotion than the occasion seemed to warrant.

" You were rather unjust to me yesterday," he said lightly, after a moment or two. " Suppose you agree to this by way of making amends ? For my part, I should like another pupil. I have had this matter in my mind for some time past."

" Have you—*really* ?" she said, shyly.

" Yes—for a month or more."

" That has been kind of you"—quickly.

" The kindness has been very small. I thought of it first rather as a relief to myself, to tell the truth."

" As a relief ?"

" Yes ; because it troubled me to think of some one always sitting solitary here through the long mornings. I am a social man, for my own part. I like company."

" Do you ?"—with rather an incredulous look.

" Exceedingly. Why do you doubt it ?"

" I don't know. I only thought that people who were students and great readers—Papa cares so little for society, you see."

" You always speak of your father and me as if we were the Siamese twins. It is flattering—to *me* ; but still, will you allow me to remind you that in

some directions, at least, I have my own individuality?"

"Oh! I beg your pardon."

"You need not do that; the assumption, I say, is one I should be unreasonable to quarrel with. Only a man generally has a prejudice in favour of being regarded as himself, and not as another person."

"Yes, I know that. I know that in a great many things—in most things—you are not like Papa at all."

"H'm!—now you are veering round rather faster than I see any occasion for. I think, Miss Austin, we won't press the question any further. I feel afraid of what you may say next. Here come the boys—very opportunely."

Hilary gave a laugh at last. She had been rather disturbed and very serious for the last quarter of an hour; but as she sat down presently to her place at the breakfast table she became aware that, with reason or without it, her spirits were rising quite involuntarily. She was glad, and she could not suppress her gladness. To what extent Mr. Hardy might care to take the trouble of carrying out his plan she could not tell, but the fact that he had proposed it soothed and comforted her amazingly.

Nor was it an insignificant additional satisfaction to her when, the meal being ended, Mr. Hardy, before the boys left the room, said to them quite carelessly and easily—

“We are going to have another pupil with us this morning, lads. Your sister is coming.”

“What—Hilary?” cried Cuthbert; and all the four boys stood and stared with eyes as round as saucers.

“Yes,” answered Mr. Hardy; “we settled it just now, before breakfast.”

“But what is she going to learn?” demanded Bob, in a tone of injury.

“Whatever she and I think good,” replied Mr. Hardy.

“Greek and Latin?” cried Bob, getting red in the face.

“Oh no!” interrupted Hilary, eagerly; “Mr. Hardy says I may come when I like, and he will help me a little; that is all.”

“Oh, well; if you're not going in for everything,” returned Bob, slightly mollified.

“I think it will be rather jolly,” said Cuthbert, suddenly. “But what put it in your head? It's a queer notion, too.”

“Where is the queerness?” asked Mr. Hardy, coolly. “I asked her to come. I think she must

be dull, sitting alone down here. I don't see why we should keep all the life to ourselves."

"No, that's true," replied Cuthbert, heartily. "I think everything is made stupid for girls. I'm glad she's coming."

And then they went off to get themselves ready for their work; and an hour afterwards, feeling curiously shy, and half eager, half unwilling, Hilary presented herself for admission at the schoolroom door, and was told by Mr. Hardy to come in.

She stayed with her brothers during all the rest of the morning. She felt strangely out of her element for the greater part of the time; everything that went on was new and embarrassing to her: she was conscious of being stupid in the small amount of work she did; she was oppressed by a painful sense of incalculable ignorance, and weighed down by no small burden of humiliation: and yet the hours passed quickly, and she knew when they ended that she had not been unhappy. She had felt strange and out of place, but she had known no weariness, no want of interest. She had lost the feeling from which she had suffered of late, of being neglected and left out. She had not had much to do with either Mr. Hardy or with the boys, but she had at least been in the midst of them; their faces had been in her sight,

and their voices in her ears. And she had made an effort to do something that was honoured with the name of work. She had studied three pages of English history, and at the end of the morning she had been questioned on it by Mr. Hardy, and it was during this half-hour of questioning that she had been made to feel so humbled and so ignorant; and yet still, in spite of her sufferings, even that half-hour had not been wholly devoid of pleasantness. For Mr. Hardy had been very gentle to her, and had given his lesson with a patience and a kindness that had made her grateful.

"You see, I know nothing at all ; do you think you can bear to go on teaching me?" she asked him shyly, when at last he closed the book ; and then he said a word or two that comforted her amazingly.

"If either of us runs any risk of getting tired, that one will not be me," he said. And then he gave her back her book. "You don't know a great deal, but you know more than I thought you did," he told her. "There—I give you *four* pages for to-morrow. You are too quick to be set short tasks."

This was just before the first dinner-bell rang, and five minutes afterwards Hilary ran downstairs,

a little nervous and excited still over her morning's doings, but glad at heart.

"Well, how do you like doing lessons, Hilary? Papa, Hilary has been up with us in the school-room all the morning. Mr. Hardy has been teaching her," said Harry presently, as they sat at table.

"Indeed?" replied Mr. Austin to this announcement, with a short laugh, and just enough amusement in his tone to bring the colour to poor Hilary's cheeks.

"Mr. Hardy was kind enough to let me come," she explained, a little deprecatingly.

"Mr. Hardy is very good-natured," answered Mr. Austin, and laughed again, as though the thing only struck him in the light of a joke.

And then nothing more was said. If his daughter chose to play at going to school, he saw no harm in it; but the matter did not interest him enough to keep his mind detained for more than a moment from more important things.

That evening, with a happy sense of having work to do, Hilary brought forward her history when tea was over, and prepared her lesson for the following day. She envied the boys no longer. They had, indeed, their classics and their mathematics to study, while she had only, as yet, her

single history ; but still she had become one of them—their master had become her master too. She smiled up at Mr. Hardy with a bright face when, at his usual time, he came into the room.

" I have done my work, and I could have done more. I think another day you must give me more," she said.

She was not out of tune with Shakspere to-night. She was very happy, and laughed, while Mr. Hardy finished the reading of his play, as heartily as the rest.





CHAPTER VI.

CONTENTMENT.

IT was a very happy time that began after this
for Hilary. She soon had her hands full of
work, and she showed herself an eager scholar.

"It seems funny to see *you* taking to learning
too," Cuthbert said to her one day, after the new
system of things had been going on for a little
while; and as he spoke, he looked at her—as he had
looked several times of late—rather suspiciously.
"I thought when you began first that you would
soon find it too dull, and give it up; but you don't
seem going to do that. You see, the truth is, *he'd*
make anybody work," said the boy, all at once.

"Yes, I suppose he would; but I don't quite
understand why," Hilary answered, thoughtfully.

"It is because he is so in earnest. I think that
must be it."

"But Papa is in earnest too," said Hilary; "and yet Papa never——"

"No—that's true," assented Cuthbert; and then both the young heads fell to meditating.

"I don't know how to put it," said Cuthbert, after a minute; "but there's something in him, as soon as you get with him—as soon as he begins to teach you—that—well, that makes you feel as if you caught fire."

"Yes, I know," replied Hilary.

"It's just as if he woke you all up."

"Yes," said Hilary again.

She seemed very tongue-tied. There was some thought labouring in her, but she could not find expression for it. She agreed with Cuthbert with all her heart; but beyond what Cuthbert said there was something else that she wanted to say, only she could not; she could not put it clearly into words.

"I think it lies a great deal in his having so much sympathy; he seems always to understand——" she could only say after a minute.

"My word, doesn't he!" exclaimed Cuthbert, with his face alight. "Understand! I never knew such a fellow for understanding. It seems to me he knows everything you think before you know it yourself."

"Yes—and it isn't only that he knows it, but he is able to throw himself into it so."

"I know he is. It's awfully jolly. He makes you feel that you can say anything to him."

"Ye—es, I suppose so." But Hilary spoke a little doubtfully.

"I mean, he makes *me* feel so. It's different with you, I daresay, because you're a girl."

"He doesn't talk to me, you know, as he would to you."

"Oh, I know that. Of course he doesn't. *We* have no end of talk."

"It must be very nice," said Hilary, with a little half-unconscious sigh.

"I should think it *was* nice," replied Cuthbert, heartily.

And then Hilary said no more. She had become very happy by this time; but yet there were still moments when her content was clouded with a little touch of envy.

On the whole, however, she had not much to complain of, or that she felt inclined to complain of. She was very well satisfied, as she sat in that pleasant schoolroom with the boys, doing her work, listening to Mr. Hardy's teaching, growing each day to feel more at home in the midst of her new environment, and growing each day, too,

like it more. Mr. Hardy was kind to her, and she on her side, if she was sometimes shy with him, was sometimes also very happily at ease. She was a variable little maiden, it is true, and she showed by no means the same humour to him always. She was quite capable now and then of holding her own with him pretty successfully ; she would jest with him and tease him sometimes, and be very tolerably wilful ; and then in another mood he would find her mild as a dove—submissive as a little child.

Perhaps in all her moods she had a certain charm. There was a kind of natural grace about her ; she was simple, and open even in her faults ; she had a face whose变ability and bright fresh beauty were very winning. Mr. Hardy used to watch her often with a half-amused look, not saying much to her. It was by no means his way to single her out from the rest of his pupils for any special attention. If he admired her, his manner did not say so. He would jest with her sometimes, if she wished to jest ; he would be kind to her frequently, and courteous at all times ; but it was only now and then, on very rare occasions, that they exchanged more than a few minutes' talk, and still more rarely that they talked on any serious subject.

But yet, as these happy weeks went on, a certain intimacy established itself between them, and a pleasant consciousness awoke in the girl's heart that they were friends—a consciousness which, half-unconsciously, made life sweeter, made all things brighter to her. For in her quiet little world, as was quite inevitable, Mr. Hardy had by this time grown to be a prominent figure. She had so few friends, and so few interests, that nothing else was possible.

Sometimes, as the days grew short, the young ones and their tutor used to gather in the twilight round the schoolroom fire, and talk, or play games, or tell tales, till the bell rang for tea; and this hour was one that Hilary liked. She would often in the course of it ply Mr. Hardy with questions, and get him to tell them incidents in his past life. She had a very childlike aptitude for asking questions, and would seek, whenever she was in a happy humour, for the sort of information she desired with a frank simplicity that it was not easy to resist. Mr. Hardy used to laugh at her often, but he very rarely refused to gratify her curiosity.

She began her attacks on him at first with very innocent leading questions.

"Where were you born?" she demanded of him one night.

"At York. Why do you ask?" he answered.

"Oh, I wanted to know. And have you any brothers?"

"Yes—two."

"And any sisters?"

"One."

"What is her name?"

"Ursula."

"Tell me something about her, please."

And then Hilary settled herself to listen, with her hands folded on her lap; and Mr. Hardy laughed.

"What do you want me to tell you? Do you wish to know her height, and the colour of her hair?" he asked.

"Yes, you may tell me those things, if you like; but other things as well. Is she quite young?"

"She is a good deal older than you are. She is five-and-twenty. But she seems young enough to me."

"Are you the eldest of them all?—older than both your brothers?"

"Yes. That is a great advantage, is it not? I can make them all look up to me, you see."

"I don't know that people's power to do that depends upon age. I daresay you make them look up to you," said Hilary, quite simply and gravely;

“but I don’t suppose you do it merely because you are the eldest. Is your sister pretty?”

“No.”

“No?”—evidently disappointed ; “*not* pretty ?”

“Not in the least.”

“Dear me, that is a pity !”

“So she thinks ; but I have never been able to agree with her.”

“Why?”—hesitating, and much amazed. “Don’t you care about—people being good-looking ?”

“I don’t care to have Ursula anything but what she is.”

“Oh, that is very nice, I think ;” and Hilary’s face brightened with sympathy. “I didn’t see that you meant that. Then you are—great friends ?”

“I am very fond of her, and—I hope she has some regard for me.”

“Does she live in York now ?”

“No ; she lives in Leicestershire.”

“With”—dropping her voice, and hesitating a little—“with your father and mother ?”

“With my mother ; my father is dead.”

“Then when *you* go home now, you go to Leicestershire too ?”

“Yes.”

“And—where are your brothers ?”

"One is in India, and the youngest is in New Zealand."

"And you are the only one at home? What a good thing you haven't gone away too!"

"Why is it a good thing? It might have been much better for me if I had."

"But not better for your people."

"You don't even know that."

"I don't *know*, of course; but it would have been dreadful, I should think, for your mother to have *all* her sons away."

"Well, I have not gone, you see."

"No; and I am very glad."

She said the last words quite quietly, and he looked at her for a moment, with something of a smile about his lips. She was the sort of pretty, piquante half-child towards whom a man can rarely feel anything but kindly. He had been answering her questions rather curtly, and yet perhaps it was evident enough that he did not dislike her to ask them.

Often, on other evenings after this, he let her go on putting them to him again, and sometimes he replied to them as briefly as to-night, and sometimes, if he were disposed to be communicative, he told both to her and to the boys a good deal that interested them all about his home and school and

college life. Cuthbert and the others would assail him with questions too when they were in the mood for them, and had their own special subjects of enquiry, upon which they often cross-examined him.

"I think you are very good-natured to tell so much to us. I wonder if we bore you very much indeed?" Hilary said to him, a little doubtfully, once.

It was one evening when the boys had rushed out of the schoolroom in a body about some matters of their own a few minutes before the tea-bell was expected to ring. They had all been sitting talking together round the fire for an hour, and then the boys went off, and in the sudden silence that followed their departure Hilary abruptly said this little sentence.

"Why should you suppose that you bored me?" he answered instantly. "If I did not like your company, could I not leave you? Or I might even, you know, if I were greatly tried, order you to leave *me*."

"Yes; we come in here whenever we like, as if we forgot that it was your room, except in school hours. I sometimes think of that," said Hilary, quickly. "Do you never feel inclined to turn us out? I should not think you rude if you did, you know. I should not mind it at all."

"Should you not?" he asked, with rather an unbelieving laugh; and then she began to hesitate a little.

"Well—I don't quite mean that I shouldn't mind it, but I should feel you had the right."

"That is another thing," he said.

"Yes—I know. But I do mean too that I would *try* not to mind. *Do* we come in too much?"—a little shyly, after a minute's pause.

"Do I treat you so uncourteously that that question is one you are obliged to ask?"

"Oh no—you don't treat us uncourteously; you are only too good to us. But your goodness ought not to make us impose upon you."

"Well, I make you free of the room at all future hours and seasons. Does that silence your scruples? Come when you please; you will be always welcome."

"I think you are very kind to say so."

"I am kind to myself. I like to have you here."

And then she made no answer, but she sat looking into the fire with a light in her face.

"I think you have brought so much to us since you came," she began to say all at once, after a minute's silence. "Sometimes I don't know whether you can quite understand it. You see, before you came we lived so completely away from

everything like—like what you give us. It was never Papa's habit to talk to us. He never cared to do it; perhaps he found it difficult; I don't know. But we had nobody to be with except one another, and we learnt nothing. What *could* we learn? It seems to me," said the girl suddenly, with a little quiver in her voice, "that we shall never be able to tell you how grateful we are to you—at least how grateful Cuthbert and I are—for all you have done for us."

"But why should you *try* to tell me?" he asked, quietly.

"Because I want you to understand," she said.

"Very well; then be satisfied that I understand."

"I think sometimes," she said, after another little silence, beginning to speak again rather timidly, and without looking at him; "I often think, when we sit here and you talk to us, that it is almost as if you were some kind elder brother rather than our master. You bear with us so, I mean; you are so kind and patient."

"Are kindness and patience, do you suppose, such special characteristics of elder brothers?"

"I think they ought to be. I think, if I had an elder brother, I should expect him to be very kind. I wonder—" And then Hilary stopped.

"What do you wonder?"

"I mean—I often think I should like to know whether you treat your sister Ursula as you treat us?"

He gave a laugh. "Well—hardly," he said. "Ursula is a good deal older than any of you are, you know. She is not in the habit of trying my patience very much."

"And *we* do, you mean?"—rather sadly.

"Did you not tell me just now yourself that you did? It was not I who said it. But, however, if you like, with certain reservations, I *will* say it. One could hardly have the charge of four boys, I should imagine, and *not* have one's temper tried occasionally."

"Four boys—and one girl."

"Oh; the girl is out of court."

"Is she?" Hilary gave a quick look at him, not quite betokening satisfaction.

"She is no charge of mine. She is only here of her own will."

"Yes—but still she *is* here."

"That is indisputable."

"Then you ought to take account of her."

"Not I!"—and he laughed. "I have quite enough to do with my other four."

She made no answer, but after a moment the corners of her lips fell. She sat looking into the

fire gravely and rather sadly, and he kept silence too, till after a minute the bell they were waiting for rang.

"There is our summons," he said then, and rose up.

Another kind of man would have said something more to her before they left the room, but Mr. Hardy did not. He had hurt her a little; but he opened the door to her and let her pass downstairs without caring to speak to her again. More than once before this he had treated her with something of the same sort of uncalled-for coldness, and poor little Hilary had felt it rather acutely. Only, after any time when he had so treated her, he had always, when they met again, seemed so unchanged, that she had tried her best not to mind these little temporary hardnesses, telling herself that they meant nothing; that they were unconscious probably on his part; that, even if he were aware of them, he was not likely to know that his indifference could give her any pain.

And yet, though she argued in this way, she used to feel a pang sometimes. Did he care so little for everybody? she wondered; was it natural to him never to show any more regard to any one than he did to them? He was very pleasant to them all; he was cordial to Cuthbert; to her he

was—well—kind, but that was all. She had begun to notice that when, in her impulsive way, she made little quick childish speeches about her gratitude to him, or some such thing, he never responded to them, or responded merely as much as courtesy required. Was he by nature so cold? she used to think—or was it only that he was cold to *them*?

Occasionally she used to try to rouse him. In some of her moods his coolness piqued her, and she would treat him as if his insensibility to all emotion were an established fact; but I am bound to allow that she rarely got the better of him in these encounters. She would try to vex him—to stab him with little shafts that should sting; but somehow the points of her weapons, when directed against him, seemed generally to become blunted. He would only laugh at her, and turn her gibes against herself. "You try to use a dagger, but you merely cut your own fingers with it," he told her once, with a coolness that brought the colour to her face.

In fact, her temperament was not much like his. She was of a nervous and excitable nature that was easily elated, easily depressed—that loved warmth, and craved for it: she was very changeable, and disposed at times to be over-exacting, at times to be unduly humble. She did not think

much of herself, poor little maiden ; and yet she longed to be thought much of by other people, and to have much given to her. She had a childish yearning for approbation, a childish shrinking from being blamed ; but she would blame herself often with quite unnecessary humiliation, and at times lay her head down in the very dust before those whom she thought she had offended or wronged.

One day when she was going over a lesson with Mr. Hardy she lost her temper, and pettishly and hastily swept the book away from him. She had made some very foolish blunder, and he had laughed at her for it, and at the moment she could not bear his laughter, for it was a mistake that exposed her ignorance, and covered her — she thought—with shame. She coloured all over with anger and annoyance.

“ There !—give it up ! What is the good of going on ? ” she exclaimed, and caught the book away from him before he could prevent her.

“ You are a very impatient child,” was all he answered.

And then he took the volume back without another word, and went on with his lesson ; and by the time they had reached the end of it she was quite subdued and penitent. She looked into his face with sorrowful, childish eyes.

"I am so ignorant; and then—I get so ashamed," she said, deprecatingly.

"You rush on blindly, and when I have to stop you, your vanity is hurt," he replied.

And on that the poor little mouth began to droop and quiver. She did not defend herself any more ; she only sat quite still, till after a few moments he said—"Is not that the truth?" And then she meekly and sadly answered, "Yes"—and took her book and went away.

But she could not forget what she had done, and hours afterwards she said to Mr. Hardy—

"I don't know what you must think of me. I couldn't have behaved worse if I had been a beggar, and had struck you when you were giving me bread."

"Why do you indulge in exaggerations?" he answered to this speech. "And when a thing is past, why do you remember it?"

"Because I can't help remembering," she said.

"You don't try to help it."

"It is easy for you to say that—but if you ever felt as ashamed as I do sometimes——"

"Do you suppose I have never felt ashamed?"

"I don't think you ever have—in this kind of way."

"Then, probably, I have in worse ways. What

did you do to-day to trouble you? You lost your temper for a moment. Well—that was very childish; but you got over it, didn't you? You are not angry now? Then why vex yourself any more about it?"

"Because"—she said, flushing and unsteadily—"because—it must make you despise me so."

"You must do a great deal worse than that before you make me despise you," he replied. "You must do worse," he added deliberately, after a moment or two's silence, "than I think you are ever likely to do."

And then, quite involuntarily, a little warmth of consolation began to curl about Hilary's heart.

"Do you mean that indeed?" she said joyfully, but only half aloud. "I think that you are too kind to me. If I could believe that you would really forget—"

"I have more than half forgotten already," he answered, with a laugh. "You confuse me with your magnifying of molehills into mountains. My slow imagination will only let me see things their natural size."

"Do you need a slow imagination to see things correctly?" she said, after a few moments' silence. "You need a very cool head, and—I suppose you have that?" She put the last words tentatively.

"What makes you think I have?"

"Well—I think"—hesitating a little—"from everything you do that your head is cool. I don't think you are moved by little things, I mean—like other people; you can judge without being carried away by your feelings."

"That is to say, you think I have not only a cool head but a cold heart?"

"No—I didn't say that."

"I accuse you of thinking it, not of saying it."

"It may be true, but I can't tell."

"I am glad you allow that there is room at least for some little doubt. I thought perhaps you had completed your judgment of me, and recorded your condemnation."

"Oh no!—not yet."

"You look forward, however, to doing it soon?"

"To condemning you?"—she shook her head with a little laugh. "I hope not. I think—whatever I might come to believe—I shouldn't do that, because, you see, I should always feel that there was something to say on the other side."

"In my favour, do you mean?"

"Yes; because of some kindnesses—that one couldn't forget—quite."

"You only think that at this moment, I am

afraid. I don't know that I would trust your memory."

"Would you not?"

"Few things are more treacherous than memories, you know."

"I know people say so, but I don't believe it. I know there are many things *I* shall never forget."

The colour had come into her face. She had often an eager way of speaking that was not wise. She said these last words with a little ring in her voice, and then she felt ashamed lest he should guess what she had meant. But if he guessed, he did not show it. In his cold way, he even asked her no further question ; he merely said—

"People often think they can never forget when they are young, and find that they have been wrong when they grow older. With every year you live you will discover that there are fewer things about which you can be sure."

She sighed and rose up. "That may be true, but I don't like to hear it," she said. "I think I shall never be a philosopher."

And then he made her no answer, and they parted.

The winter set in sharply this year, and there was snow upon the ground and ice upon the ponds

when Christmas came. The boys had a fortnight's holiday, and Mr. Hardy went home.

"I think we shall be very dull without him," Hilary said to Cuthbert the day before he was to leave them; and Cuthbert exclaimed to him earnestly, "I wish you weren't going, sir. We shall have lots of skating, I hope; but it won't be half as good fun as if you were here."

Hilary and Cuthbert at any rate regretted their tutor's departure, if the others were indifferent to it, and if he was indifferent himself—as, to tell the truth, he rather seemed to be. The place that he was going to had probably more attractions for him than the one that he was leaving.

"I wonder if he would care though he never saw one of us again!" Hilary suddenly thought on the last night to herself.

She was a little depressed that evening, and a little sore. She wanted some kind word from him—something that should make her feel that he took a little interest in her—and he would not give her one. He sat by the schoolroom fire, placid and cool, talking to them, and letting them talk, but not showing one sign of regard for them.

"I suppose things go that way always. We care for him, and he does not care for us," the girl thought, half-bitterly. "He has been with us for

these three months, and we are nothing to him but a set of children whom he has to teach."

It seemed hard to her ; for a little while she was hurt and almost angry, but presently a better spirit began to come into her.

" Well, we *are* only children ; why should we interest him ? " she thought. " He couldn't feel to us as we do to him. He will go away to his own people. I wonder, when he is in the midst of them, if he will ever think of us ! I wonder if they are very proud of him ! If I were his sister I should be, I know."

She had thought the same thing before now : ever since she had known about Ursula Hardy she had thought that she was a girl to be much envied.





CHAPTER VII.

WITH THE NEW YEAR.

THE frost grew strong, and the young people skated to their hearts' content while Mr. Hardy was away; but one or two of them were sorry that he was not with them, and Hilary missed him more even, perhaps, than she had expected to do.

She spent a good deal of her time during this fortnight with the boys, but yet not her whole time, for, at her own request, Mr. Hardy had left her some work to do in his absence, and to this she steadily devoted a part of every day, feeling perhaps those hours the happiest that were so employed; for to learn the lessons that he had set her seemed to her to be like doing something for him, and Hilary, being very grateful to Mr. Hardy, longed to do something for him with her whole

heart. She used to pore over her books till sometimes even Cuthbert found fault with her. Cuthbert was working himself, but still he retained a wholesome recollection that this was not school time but holiday time, and that frosts in this uncertain climate do not last.

It was a very quiet neighbourhood, and the Austins had few friends, and even few acquaintances, near them. There were one or two girls whom Hilary knew; the boys had a few boy companions, but the number of these was very small, and the visits that they paid to the house rare to the last degree, for Mr. Austin gave little encouragement to the inroads of any visitors. He was an unsociable man, who wanted no society for himself, and thought that his children had enough for all reasonable needs in one another. So these five young people spent their Christmas this year, as they usually did, by themselves. They had relations, but none who lived within a hundred miles of them. Mr. Austin, when he had moved to his present abode a dozen years or so ago, had indeed chosen his residence with a clearly-defined purpose of putting himself beyond his relations' reach.

We rarely, however, pine for what we have never known, and so the Austin children were content enough as they amused themselves on Christmas

night round their own fireside. Their father was in his study ; their tutor was spending his Christmas under another roof. "I wonder what he has been doing all day!" Hilary had thought a score of times.

Why did she think so often of him? The others seemed able to forget him pretty easily, but she could not forget him. She was always thinking and wondering. "I wish Mr. Hardy was here," Cuthbert said to-night, and Hilary felt suddenly grateful to Cuthbert. It was very foolish to be grateful, only none of the others seemed to be remembering Mr. Hardy at all, and when Cuthbert spoke it was like an echo of Hilary's own thought. And then presently she sat down by her brother's side, and during the rest of the evening she singled him out as the fit recipient of several special small attentions, which he accepted calmly, as natural signs of a general recognition of merit, though without according them any special significance.

Mr. Hardy was to stay with his own people for a week after Christmas, and to return to his pupils on the second of January. Before the old year expired the weather changed, and the frost vanished, and the first sun of the new year rose into a cloudless sky. It was a day almost like

spring, and Hilary sat at her work in the sunshine by the open schoolroom window, with some robins singing outside, and she herself almost as happy as the birds. "To-morrow Mr. Hardy will be here," she was thinking. "Only one day more now, and then we shall all be gathered in this dear little room again. Only one other day! How dreary it would seem now if we had not his coming to look forward to!"

Through the open window she heard the boys' voices down below, shouting at their play. *They* seemed entirely happy, it must be allowed, at the present moment, and by no means yearning for any change in their condition; but Hilary knew what was good for them, and shook her shrewd little head.

"They have had quite long enough holidays," she thought to herself. "How they do love to be idle!" But after a moment she was honest enough to add—"Well, so did I too, till Mr. Hardy came; I was as bad as any of them four months ago."

And then she rose from her seat, and craned her neck, and peeped down from the window, till she caught sight of the four boys below, harnessing the old collie dog Oscar, at which sight she burst out laughing; and then there came a moment's hesita-

tation, and after that moment down went Hilary's pen out of her fingers, and away she flew out of the room, and, like a flash of light, was in the midst of them.

"Oh, boys, what are you going to do with him?" she exclaimed. "The dear old fellow—how patiently he stands! Suppose," said this stern decryer of idleness, "we were to put a pannier on each side of him, and take some bread and butter and cake, and have a little picnic before dinner in the woods?"

"Hurrah!" cried Dick, who was ready for cake and bread and butter at all times—and in two more seconds the thing was settled.

"It's the last day, you see," said Hilary, a little self-excusingly; but the boys were quite innocent of all consciousness that any excuse was necessary, and regarded their sister's words, if they regarded them at all, merely as an irrelevant remark, not bearing any relation to the matter in hand.

The sun was warm and the wood was dry, and they had their picnic, and were very merry over it.

"Oh, what a bother lessons are!" Bob exclaimed once, with his mouth full of seed-cake. "I wish Mr. Hardy was at Jericho!"

And Dick and Harry, when he said this, burst out laughing. Even Cuthbert laughed a little;

and only Hilary flushed up, and rebuked Bob for his flippancy.

"It would be worse for *you*, perhaps, if Mr. Hardy were at Jericho. You might get a very different kind of master in his place," she said, severely.

But reckless Bob only laughed again at this.

"I'd risk it," he replied. "I'd get one, perhaps, who wouldn't make me work."

"You would get one, perhaps, who would flog you," said Hilary.

"Oh, come!" cried Bob, and sat suddenly upright, feeling that his sister was beginning to pass the bounds of fair argument.

"Well, you might," persisted Hilary; "so I think you had better be satisfied with how things are."

"And who said I was *not* satisfied?" retorted illogical Bob.

And then Cuthbert had to interfere to restore the peace.

"Shut up!" he said sharply to his brother. "We're very well off, and you know that as well as anyone. You're always going on about something. I say, Hilary, is there nothing more left to eat?"

"Oh yes—ever so much," replied Hilary, cheerfully; and then she served out a fresh supply of

cake, and—to make up their little quarrel—gave the largest piece to Bob—which arrangement Bob, with his sharp eye for such matters, perceived, and graciously accepted as an *amende*.

"Mr. Hardy's as good as anybody else, I daresay. All tutors are bores, but he's better than a lot of them, I suppose," he condescended carelessly to remark, after a time—by way of relieving his conscience, probably; and Hilary was wise enough to hear him, and make no response.

In point of fact, the boys liked their tutor as well as most tutors are liked. A man who, out of five pupils, gains the hearts of two, has not much to complain of; and Mr. Hardy had done this.

"I'm glad he's coming back to-morrow—aren't you, Hilary? I think it's jolly," said Cuthbert, walking home presently by Hilary's side. And then these two talked about him for a little while, and Hilary's ruffled feathers were smoothed. "Cuthbert has so much more sense than the rest of them," she thought with satisfaction to herself.

The next morning she was all kindling with life and expectation. "You are to be at the station, you know, by three o'clock," she began to remind Cuthbert before breakfast was over, and she looked at her watch as the day went on a hundred times. She felt too happy to work; she went rambling

about the house and the gardens, doing little except playing with the boys.

She was as light-hearted and full of joyousness as a child. When at half-past two the four boys started together in a body to meet the train, she ran upstairs after seeing them away, singing to herself for very gladness. Poor little Hilary! She was thinking, "I will go and make up the school-room fire. I will have the room warm and bright, so that it shall look as if it welcomed him, and he will sit down with us in the old way, and tell us all he has been doing." This was what was in her mind; and then suddenly, in a moment, all the world became changed for her. With her happy thought in her heart, and her song upon her lips, she sprang upstairs, and all at once slipped and fell. Perhaps her foot caught in her dress; but she never knew afterwards. She slipped and tried to save herself, and could not; and then the servants down below, and Mr. Austin in his study, heard a crash and a cry, and, as they rushed into the hall, they found Hilary lying in a shuddering heap at the bottom of the stairs.

With difficulty her father lifted her up, for the tears started to her eyes, and she quivered with pain at his first attempt to raise her; but after a minute he got her in his arms, and carried her to

her own room. "Take her up at once if you can, sir ; she'll have to be got up," one of the servants said ; so he went upstairs with her, trembling beneath his burden, and laid her on her bed.

She was conscious then, but the little face was all white and drawn. She tried to speak, but they could hardly hear what she said. "I'm so sorry!" she whispered to her father once, clinging to him with a deprecating look. "It's only my back," she said presently with a gasp, in a feeble, explanatory way.

The boys had all gone to meet their tutor, and Mr. Austin himself, shaken rudely but thoroughly for the moment out of his usual self-absorption, drove off for the doctor, and brought him back with him. His errand occupied more than an hour. When he returned with Dr. Carter, the two men found Hilary lying quiet enough.

"I don't feel much pain now," she said at first, in reply to the doctor's question ; but presently, when he began to examine her, she had to set her teeth together to keep from crying.

He said nothing for a few minutes, but after that—"Well, you have had a nasty fall, but it might have been worse," he told her cheerfully. "We will get you to bed now, and then you must be content to stay there. Bones broken? Oh no,

there are no bones broken. You have strained your back ; that's what it is. You have only to be patient, and I hope we shall get you all right again. I've no doubt we shall, if you do what you're told, and if you keep up your spirits, and don't get frightened. Mind, when I come to-morrow, I shall expect to see a little colour in your face."

He had known her all her life, and he tapped her cheek, with a laugh at his last words, and then she smiled a little too ; for, to tell the truth, the poor little girl *had* been frightened ; she had thought to herself that perhaps she had broken her back and was going to die, and when Dr. Carter spoke only of a strain, he made her heart leap up with its return to hope and joy. (For she was very ignorant, and a strain seemed a small thing to her.) "Oh, Papa, I am so sorry for having alarmed you ! I am so sorry and ashamed !" she cried presently, with her arms in an unaccustomed way round Mr. Austin's neck.

The short daylight was gone by this time ; it was nearly five o'clock. Lying with her wide open eyes, Hilary after a little asked one question.

"Sarah, has Mr. Hardy come ?" she said.

"Yes, dear," answered Sarah, who was an old servant ; "he's been back this hour and more."

And then Hilary turned away her face, and no one knew the longing with which the poor little heart was full.

"I had wanted so to be with them all to-night. Oh, I am so sorry not to be with them!" she thought, and the tears came and filled her eyes.

"I may see Cuthbert for a minute—mayn't I?" she asked presently in a wistful voice; and Sarah answered cheerfully—"Oh yes, my dear; why not?" and went away forthwith, and brought the boy into the room.

He came in rather shyly, walking on tiptoe, and looking grieved, but embarrassed.

"Cuthbert!" cried Hilary, with eagerness.

"Oh, Hilary, this is dreadful," said Cuthbert, awkwardly, and half in his throat.

"Yes—it's stupid, isn't it? I'm terribly sorry. But never mind; it might have been so much worse, you know. It's only a strain, Dr. Carter says. I wanted you to tell me something about yourselves. What are you all doing?"

"Oh, nothing," answered Cuthbert, communicatively.

"But where are you sitting?"

"I don't know where the others are. Mr. Hardy and I have been in the schoolroom."

"How is Mr. Hardy?"

"Oh, he's all right."

"Has he had nice holidays, do you think?"

"I don't know. I daresay he has. He's awfully sorry about *you*"—abruptly.

"Is he?" with a little involuntary tone of joy in her voice.

"Well, of course he is. It was enough to frighten anybody when we came in and they told us first. That Harriet is a goose! She said your back was broken," exclaimed Cuthbert, indignantly.

"But they all thought it was at first."

"They might have thought it was as much as they liked, but nobody who wasn't a goose would have told it to us in the way she did. *I shan't forget it in a hurry, I know,*" said Cuthbert, with his boyish lip—though he tried to look savage—beginning to quiver.

"I'm *so* sorry," said Hilary, meekly. "Oh, Cuthbert, was it not stupid of me? And I had been looking forward to to-night so much. Will you say something to Mr. Hardy for me? Just tell him, I mean, that—that I should like to have seen him."

"Oh yes—but he knows, of course," said Cuthbert, half impatiently.

"I am not sure that he knows. I should like

you to tell him. And say too, please, that I hope he has had a pleasant holiday."

"All right," said Cuthbert.

"And now, dear, go back to him ; that is all I wanted. Perhaps you might come in for another minute before you go to bed ; will you ? Just for a minute, to tell me what you have been doing ?"

"Oh yes," said Cuthbert, "I'll come."

She sighed as the boy went away. "How nice it would have been if I could have gone with him !" she thought.

Her father after tea came upstairs, and sat for a little while by her bedside. "This is very dull for you, my dear," he said kindly, and after a few minutes he began to read something to her from a newspaper that he had brought up with him. He read to her for half-an-hour—the first time that Hilary could remember his having done such a thing in all her life. "Thank you so much. That has been so nice," she said simply, when he had finished. She was touched by his kindness, and lifted her face up for him to kiss her before he went away.

"Everybody is kind," she thought presently, as she lay alone, listening for sounds in the house that did not often come. She heard a door open and shut now and then : she heard Dick once say

something on the stairs, and immediately afterwards suffer apparent strangulation, for some one rushed at him with a smothered "Hush!" and there was the sound of a momentary struggle, and then perfect silence; and Hilary sighed as she lay alone.

"That is Sarah who has stopped him," she thought; "but she must not try to do that. It would be dreadful if I were never to be allowed even to hear the boys' voices." And so, presently, when Sarah came up, she said—"Don't keep the boys from going on as usual, please. I don't need them to be quiet, you know, because my back is hurt."

No, so far from wanting them to be quiet, it seemed to her as if the sound of their voices and their steps had never been so welcome to her before. All through the weary days that followed she used to think this. For a week went slowly past after this day, and Hilary still kept her bed. She suffered a good deal of pain, and her progress was very slow—so slow that her heart sank sometimes; but yet Dr. Carter professed himself satisfied with her. "You must not lose patience: you are doing very well: you must let Nature take her time," he always said. After ten days he began to speak of allowing her to be moved for a little to a sofa

in her room, but more than a fortnight elapsed before the change was actually made.

It was the longest fortnight, poor Hilary thought, that she had ever spent. She used to read to herself a little, and knit a little, and talk to the boys when it pleased them to visit her; but yet she had to endure many a weary hour. "I wish I might get up, and lie near the window," she was always thinking. If she could lie where she could see out of doors, she might watch the boys at play, she thought—she might see Mr. Hardy sometimes. From her bed she could see nothing, except the tree-tops, and the fields far away.

She made them leave her door nearly always ajar, that she might catch what sounds she could of life within the house, and often—at times when there was most astir—to lie and listen for steps and voices was the greatest amusement that she had. The boys had shown themselves by no means backward in taking her assurance that the noise of their play was pleasant to her, and generally gave her the opportunity of indulging in that enjoyment to an ample extent: Mr. Hardy, too, passed often along the passage outside her door, and her ear never missed his step. Once or twice, but not oftener, she heard his voice. One day he called to Cuthbert as the boy was coming out of her room,

and stood talking to him for a minute or more, so near to her that she could hear the words he said. But this happened only once.

He used, however, to send daily messages of enquiry to her, and once or twice there went up on her breakfast tray a little bunch of violets, that Sarah reported to have been gathered by him; and the days when these small gifts came to her were white days to Hilary. "Will you please thank Mr. Hardy?" was all she could say in return for them; but she used to keep the flowers upon her pillow all day, and look at them, and think of the giver, more than was wise. For, in the enforced idleness of this time, what could this poor half-child, half-woman do but think of the things she cared for most? She was always looking back upon the happy months that were past, and picturing and longing for the time when she should see Mr. Hardy again. She never thought of the danger of such occupation; she never thought that it was unwise to indulge in it.

"I think we may venture to have you on your sofa to-morrow," Dr. Carter said cheerfully at last one day, and Hilary's face brightened. "Oh, I am so glad!" she answered, joyfully. But the effort of being dressed and transferred to her new couch next day tired her more than she had expected

that it would. The servants were very tender with her, and her father carried her to the sofa in his arms ; but instead of being happy when she got there, as she had thought she should be, the poor little soul at first began to cry. The first steps towards convalescence are not always pleasant steps, and, weak, and tired, and aching, Hilary almost wished for a little while that they had left her undisturbed in bed.

But this was only quite at the beginning. Her father sat down beside her, looking at her in a troubled way, and then she felt ashamed of herself, and made a great effort to be brave.

"I think it will be very nice presently. When one has been in bed a good while, one feels so stupid just at first," she said, deprecatingly. "Papa, I didn't mean to vex you ;" and she began remorsefully to stroke his hand, and put it to her cheek.

Mr. Austin had been very tender to his poor little daughter during this fortnight, and Hilary's heart had warmed and opened to him more than it had done throughout all her life before. He sat by her side now, and talked to her soothingly, till Sarah came into the room with some beef-tea.

"This is what you want, my dear," said Sarah, with practical good sense ; and she was right, for

in half-an-hour more Hilary was herself again, and quite ready to laugh and look up cheerfully, when Cuthbert, at the end of that time, with a hearty “Oh, I say, this *is* jolly!” burst into the room.

“Why, Hilary, you’ll be able to walk again soon now, won’t you?” he said presently, surveying her critically as she lay; but she shook her head at this question, with a little sigh.

“Oh no, I’m afraid not; my back is so weak yet,” she answered.

Cuthbert looked grave. “That’s a horrid bore,” he said.

“I don’t know when I shall be able to walk; not for weeks to come, I think.”

“Oh dear!” cried Cuthbert, so sorry, that the fountains of his eloquence became quite closed.

That afternoon Hilary had her first sight of Mr. Hardy as he walked up to the garden gate with some of the boys. He had his back towards her, but she lay and looked at him with the colour in her face; and then for more than an hour afterwards she watched for his coming back; but watched only to be disappointed, for he returned to the house, she learnt from Cuthbert afterwards, another way.

Cuthbert and Mr. Hardy and one or two of the others had gone out together, and as they walked

Cuthbert had suddenly exclaimed, "It's awfully hard for Hilary!" and then went on to tell Mr. Hardy how long she expected it would still be before she should be able to walk.

"Just think of being shut up in her room all that time!" exclaimed the boy in his pity.

"But if she is able to leave her bed, why need she be shut up?" enquired Mr. Hardy quietly, when the lad said this. "She is on a sofa, is she not? Why should not the sofa be wheeled sometimes into the schoolroom?"

"I say, what a capital idea!" cried Cuthbert. "And I don't believe anybody else would have thought of it!"

"It seems to me such a simple idea that I think you will find everybody has thought of it," Mr. Hardy answered, laughing.

But it turned out that Cuthbert was right and Mr. Hardy wrong. The boy bolted into his sister's room the moment he got back to the house.

"I say, Hilary, what do you think Mr. Hardy has thought of?" he exclaimed, brimming over with pleasure at the prospect of carrying out his tutor's scheme.

"What?" asked Hilary, wondering.

"He says we are to move you into the schoolroom!"

"But you can't," answered Hilary, not taking fire at all.

"Why can't we? We are to wheel in your sofa, he says. We can do it like blazes!"—and Cuthbert, with reason, looked triumphant.

Hilary gave an actual little cry of pleasure, and the tardy colour came to her face in a flood.

"Oh," she cried, "if you might do that—if nobody would object!"

"Why in the world should anybody object? We shan't hurt you."

"No, no—I know you wouldn't. But we must see what Dr. Carter says."

"Well, you can do that to-morrow."

"Yes, we must wait till to-morrow"—and she gave a little sigh.

"Isn't it a capital plan, though?"

"It's delightful! But, Cuthbert, did Mr. Hardy really make it?"

"Why, if he didn't, you don't think I would say he did, surely?"

"It was *very* kind of him"—with fervour.

"He said it all in a moment, as if it was the most natural thing in the world to think of."

"Will you thank him, please? Will you tell him how much I like the thought of it?"

"Oh yes, I'll tell him."

"Do you think"—hesitating a little—"do you think, Cuthbert, that he means I am to come in—to do lessons?"

"Oh, well—no—I don't suppose that," said Cuthbert, doubtfully. "He may, but I shouldn't think it."

"Then I wonder"—with a little tone of disappointment—"when exactly he thought I might come?"

"Oh, any time; just whenever you like, I should say."

"But I shouldn't care about it unless some of you were in the room, and you will be at lessons all the mornings, and in the afternoons you are nearly always out, and then at night you sit downstairs."

"We are not obliged to sit downstairs, though—and, any way, there's always a good time before tea. But I'll see what Mr. Hardy says," promised Cuthbert, as if that would settle the question; and Hilary gravely answered, "Yes; do."

The matter, however, was not quite arranged by Mr. Hardy. It was referred to a higher authority, and Dr. Carter, and not the tutor (who would certainly have declined the decision if it had been offered to him), settled on the following day that Hilary should be wheeled into the schoolroom as

early in the afternoon as she pleased. "It is a very good plan to take her there," he said cordially to Mr. Austin, "for she begins to want a little amusement; and a couple of those sturdy lads of yours will draw her sofa in easily. You can't do better for her than set her amongst the young ones now. They will do her nothing but good."

So Hilary, on this second day after she had risen from her bed, took her solitary dinner as usual (which, however, she was almost too excited to eat), and then Cuthbert and Bob laid hands on her couch, and in another minute she was once more in the pleasant little room of which she had thought so often, and which she had so often longed to see again.

A fire was burning brightly in its grate—a red winter sun was coming in through its windows—but the sunshine and the firelight at her entrance had the room to themselves. Hilary had thought that perhaps Mr. Hardy would be in it too, but he was not. After she had been brought in and established in her corner, and after Sarah had gone away, she had only Cuthbert and Bob to talk to for a quarter of an hour.

"I suppose Mr. Hardy has gone out," Cuthbert said, after a little while; and then Hilary answered just a little sadly that she supposed he had, and

told the boys to go too. " You know you will find me here when you come back. You must not stop indoors because of me," she said.

They did go presently, and after that she lay alone for what seemed to her rather a long time. Sarah came more than once and looked after her, but nobody else looked after her at all, and she was getting a little tired and down-hearted (for even the most humble-minded invalid, on her return to the world, instinctively expects some small rejoicing at her reappearance), when in the twilight the welcome sound of returning feet greeted her ears; at last there was a step upon the stairs, and it came along the passage to her door; and then Mr. Hardy entered, and walked quickly up to her, and put out his hand.

" I am so glad to see you here again," he said, cordially. He stood for a moment or two holding her hand and looking at her. It was the greeting, gained at last, that she had thought of a thousand times.

A small thing to have cared so much for! and yet it did not seem small to Hilary. The colour came to her face with happiness.

" It has seemed such a long time," she answered, shyly.

"No wonder it has done that. No wonder you have been tired."

"I don't think I shall be tired now," she said, quickly. "It has been—a little dull sometimes—but I am so glad to be back here again, now. And I am so grateful to *you*," said the girl, suddenly, in her childish way.

"You have nothing in the world to be grateful to me for," he answered, with a laugh. But it was a pleasant laugh, and, as he spoke, he sat down by her side. "You have been getting thin," he said next moment. "You don't look as you did when I saw you last."

"Yes—I am thinner—but that doesn't matter. I am so much better now."

"I shall be so glad when I see you yourself again."

"Shall you?"—timidly, but happily. "You are very good. But everybody has been so kind to me. And—you had nice holidays—had you not?" said Hilary, changing the subject abruptly. "I asked the boys, but they didn't tell me much."

"Yes, I had very pleasant holidays. And so had you, I hear?"

"Oh yes. But—did you do anything particular? Did you stay in Leicestershire all the time?"

"The whole time. I stayed and—skated : that was about all."

"I didn't know you cared for skating so much?"—looking rather surprised.

"Nor did I know it"—with a laugh. "But we had a Canadian staying with us, and she made skaters of us all."

"A Canadian *girl*?"

"Yes."

"Was she nice?"—after a moment's pause.

"Very nice. And she skated wonderfully. You would have liked to see her."

"I don't know that I should have cared much"—a little petulantly.

"Oh yes—I think you would have cared. You would like to see most things if they were well done. This girl——"

"Why do you call her 'this girl'? Had she not a name?"

"Yes"—laughing—"she had a name. She was a Miss Webster."

"Then why don't you say 'Miss Webster'?"

"I am quite ready to say it. Miss Webster skated, I was going to tell you, as if she were a sort of modern Mercury, with wings at her heels."

"Oh, I suppose it was very pretty"—rather

wearily ; "but I don't think I should have cared much about it. I don't care for American girls."

"Miss Webster is a Canadian."

"Well, it is all the same—isn't it?"

"You would rather surprise a Canadian if you told him so."

"I don't see how there can be much difference, when they all live in the same place."

"But they don't all live in the same place."

"They live on the same continent."

"That is a very different matter. Turks and Frenchmen live on the same continent."

"Oh, well—you know what I mean. It doesn't matter," said Hilary, a little impatiently. (Hilary, you see, was not keenly alive to the advantages of geographical accuracy.) "I am glad you had such delightful holidays"—spoken, however, not quite as though that fact made her so *very* happy. "You must have been sorry when they ended."

"Must I? Why do you take that for granted? The skating was all at an end, you know."

"Yes—but you were doing other pleasant things, I daresay."

"That is true. For one thing, I was reading a good deal to my mother, whose eyes are beginning to fail her, and I found that very pleasant indeed."

The petulance was gone from Hilary's tone in a moment. She looked up at him quickly.

"Then your mother, at any rate, must have been sorry when you came away?" she said.

"Yes—my mother and I are always sorry to part."

"I can't think how she can bear it at all. At least I can't think how she can bear to have you so far away, when you are her only son in England."

"She is obliged to submit to that for a time. Perhaps she may not have to bear it for very long."

"What do you mean?" said Hilary, with a startled face.

"I mean that I hope to be more with her presently than I have been of late. You don't think, do you," he asked with a sudden laugh, "that I contemplate spending all my life as I am spending it now?"

"Oh, n—no; but I was afraid——" she said.

He looked at her kindly for a moment, for her meaning was too evident for him to pretend to misunderstand it.

"I hope my pupils are no readier to part with me yet than I am to part with them," he said, quickly and cordially. "But one does not live,

you know, and not look forward. Some day I hope to have my mother nearer to me."

"It would be very nice for you." But still Hilary gave a little inward sigh. "And it would be very nice for your sister too."

"Yes—only Ursula may be thinking by that time of having a home of her own."

"Oh!" opening her eyes with sudden interest—"is she going to be married?"

"She is engaged to be married, but she will have to wait."

"Will she? Why?"

"Because her lover must make an income before he can take a wife."

"Oh!—that seems hard."

"Hard that he can't take his wife as soon as he wants her?" Mr. Hardy gave rather a contemptuous laugh. "That is not a very uncommon trouble."

"But if they like one another very much, and want to be together, it seems a little hard that they are not able to marry."

"They must exercise patience. These two we are speaking of are very well off. They see one another constantly, and they have the endless satisfaction of talking together over their future hopes."

"I think"—looking at him with a shade of dissatisfaction—"that you say that rather unsympathetically."

"Perhaps I do. Perhaps I am rather more inclined to keep my sympathy for those who hold their tongues."

"Are you?"—dubiously.

"There is great virtue in silence, you know."

"Yes, for the person who keeps silent, but not perhaps for the other one," said Hilary, not very intelligibly.

"The 'other one' would have no trouble about the matter, probably, if it were not put into her head. That is the rational way to look at the question. But I see you don't agree with me," said Mr. Hardy, with rather an amused laugh; "so suppose we talk of something else. Tell me what *you* did all your holidays? You skated, I know; but what else did you do?"

And then she began her little narration. She had got her exercise book with its uncorrected exercises still to show him; she had her histories with their unsaid lessons. She told Mr. Hardy how much she had learnt and written, and then she glowed and brightened when he praised her.

"Only you should not have worked so much.

You must have stayed indoors too long to do all this," he told her.

"Oh, I *wanted* to work," she answered simply. "I liked it."

"That is evident," he said.

"Though I was puzzled sometimes. It was so different from doing lessons with you close at hand. Mr. Hardy," she said, suddenly and wistfully, "do you think I may not work a little again now?"

"It is for yourself to decide, I should think," he answered.

"If Papa thought I was well enough, might I?"

"Surely," he said.

"And you won't mind my being here a good part of the day? It is your room, I know; but will you mind my using it much—for a few weeks?"

"If you knew how glad I am to see you in it again, you would not ask me that. Neither this room nor any other part of the house has seemed itself without you."

"Has it not?" and she flushed with pleasure.

"Oh, I am so glad to hear you say that!"

"You like to be missed, then?"

"Yes, I do."

"And I suppose you have been pluming yourself in your retirement over the thought of how

badly we have all been getting on since you left us to ourselves? Well, we *have* got on badly."

"I think I should like that to be true, but I know it is not. I know just about how much I am worth;" and Hilary shook her grave little head.

"Indeed? Then you have grown to be very wise. I never suspected you, before you were ill, of having any very just notions upon that point."

"You did not know"—laughing and colouring.

"So you imagine that you have found out the true value to put upon yourself? Shrewd little Hilary Austin! You have learnt, then, what most people live and die without finding out."

"Now you are laughing at me," she said.

"Yes, I am laughing. Did you want me to treat that statement seriously? Don't you know that no human being has a fixed value? The person who is nothing to me may be worth the world filled with gold to some one else."

"Oh yes, I know"—a little shyly.

"Then how can you tell what your value is? Your value is the price that each of your friends chooses to set upon you, and that varies with each separate friend you have."

"But I may be bad or good," she said—"I may be worth much or little—quite apart from what my friends think of me."

"Ah, very true, you may be bad or good ; but how are you to be the judge of your own merits ? and if you happen to be neither very bad nor very good (which is a common case), what sort of conclusion at all do you expect to come to ?"

He was trying to puzzle her, and seemed rather to enjoy his occupation, for he laughed heartily, and was laughing still a few moments afterwards when some of the boys came into the room.

It was Dick and Bob who came, bearing between them, with great excitement, a beetle of which they had just made capture, and about whose nomenclature they were disputing vehemently.

"Mr. Hardy, look here !" cried Bob, as he burst in.

"Mr. Hardy," interrupted Dick, forcing himself to the front, "Bob declares, like a goose——"

Mr. Hardy rose from his seat, and the boys took possession of him. There was no more quiet in the schoolroom after that. The beetle controversy rose high for a time ; then the other boys came in, and joined in the dispute, and everybody talked together till the tea-bell rang. There had not been much more notice taken of Hilary, but Mr. Hardy spoke another word to her before he went away.

"Is it true, as Cuthbert says, that you are going

to let them learn their lessons up here with you presently?" he asked.

"If they would," she answered, "I should like it."

"Then I may see you again, and I won't say good-night yet."

She brightened at that. She was such a child that you could always read her joy or her sorrow in her face.

"Will you come back for a little? Oh, that will be nice!" she answered simply.

The boys made their reappearance after tea, and the room was fairly silent for an hour and a-half, as they did their work. Hilary read meanwhile to herself. A little while before the lesson-books were put away Mr. Hardy came in, and sat down again beside her in his former seat.

"Are you not tired yet?" he asked her.

He looked at her as he spoke with great gentleness and pity. There was something about Hilary which would have made it easy for anyone not to treat her as though she were a woman—something that might easily have tempted anyone who liked her, or was sorry for her, to forget her nineteen years. Her eyes had such an innocent appeal in them; her thick hair falling in its half curls on her neck seemed almost to invite a caressing hand. She must have seemed very much of a child to

Mr. Hardy ; but he only looked at and spoke to her for a moment or two ; and then he turned away, and began to read a book that he had brought up with him, and she also went on reading.

In a little while, however, she said something to him again.

"Is that a book only for yourself, or are you going to read anything out of it to us presently ?" she asked, a little shyly.

"That is as you please to decide," he answered, with a smile. "There—do you want to look at it?"—and he held it out to her.

She took the volume and glanced at its title page ; but she knew nothing about it.

"Is it nice ?" she asked, simply.

"I don't know if you would think it nice. It is very eloquent, and very learned."

"Oh !" she said, giving it quickly back, as if it burnt her fingers ; "then I am afraid I shouldn't understand it."

"Why? Can you not understand learned books ?"

She shook her head a little indignantly.

"You know I can't."

"I am not so sure of that."

"Then you might be sure. You know it quite well. I like poetry."

"Some poetry is very learned."

"Yes; but not the kind I like."

"Well, you can't read poetry always, you know."

"No—but I like you to read it to me. I should like you to read some to-night, please—if you would."

"If you ask in that coaxing way, I suppose it would be impossible to say 'No'?"

He laughed as he spoke, but it was a very gentle laugh.

"I am afraid as long as you lie here you expect to get your own way altogether?" he said.

"I don't know. I should like to get it."

"Like a true daughter of Eve?"

"I don't think the daughters of Eve are any worse than her sons. Don't we all like our own way? I am sure you do"—with sudden boldness. D—don't you?"—the boldness as suddenly giving way to a little faltering.

"You seem to me to be forgetting the proper respect of a pupil."

"Oh, but pupils are not always respectful."

"No, not all pupils; but I had hoped you were."

"And so I am. You know I am?"—inquiringly, and a little bit alarmed.

"I don't know if you are respectful, but you are

very talkative. If these youngsters don't know their lessons to-morrow, I shall lay the blame on you."

"Very well, then ; I will be quiet. Only, you see"—deprecatingly—"I have had to be quiet so very much of late."

"And that must have been a sore trial to such a little chatterbox ? I can understand it. You would talk pretty well always, I suppose, if you could do as you liked—wouldn't you ?"

"I don't know, quite. I think talking is very nice."

"So do I. And I think the babbling of a little brook is very nice. Some people have a strong resemblance to brooks."

"They might be like worse things—mighthn't they ?"

"No doubt of it."

"And even brooks stop talking sometimes—in winter, when the ice is over them."

"But there is no winter here." He turned and looked at her with a sudden smile. "Unless this last fortnight has been winter," he said all at once, "when the little voice has been silent."

There was a moment's pause, and then he took up his book again. "Now go back to your reading," he said ; and she made no answer, but

read obediently till Cuthbert pushed back his chair, and rose up, looking—as usual at the end of lesson-learning time—rather wild about his head.

"That's been rather a stiff bit," he said, "but I think it will do now. I say," he exclaimed, "is it nine o'clock already?"

He joined the other two, and they began to talk. In a few minutes more the lesson-books were all piled up, and the boys gathered round Hilary's sofa. They did not have any reading. With one accord they agreed that it was too late to begin. So they contented themselves with chattering, till Sarah came at half-past nine to summon Hilary to bed.





CHAPTER VIII.

CONVALESCENCE.

AFTER this day Hilary returned, in moderation, to her work. The boys used to bring her into the schoolroom an hour or two before dinner, and she would lie on her sofa and say her lessons, if Mr. Hardy had time to hear them. Sometimes he was too busy to hear them, and then the time he gave to her would be transferred to the afternoon ; but when this happened it used to vex her, for she thought—reasonably—that she had no right to break into the small portion of the day that he could call his own.

“ When you can’t take me in the morning, please let my lessons stand over altogether,” she often earnestly begged him ; but he would never listen to her.

“ A man may neglect his duties, but he clings to

his pleasures, you know," he told her, laughing, once.

He used to say kind things to her, not unfrequently, during these weeks, but he nearly always said them in a jesting way, and the jesting used to hurt Hilary sometimes. She cared so much for his kindness that she did not like it to be always given carelessly or with a laugh.

" You never say nice things to people as if you meant them," she told him, with grave reproach, one day. " I think you must be really very unfeeling, for you never seem to notice, or to care, whether you vex anybody or not."

" But why should I suspect myself of vexing people?" he enquired coolly when she made this charge; and then the poor little girl did not find it easy to answer him. Was not the truth, perhaps, not that he was too phlegmatic, but that she was too sensitive?—that she felt his indifference only because she was so little indifferent herself?—that she wanted signs of a regard that he did not feel for her?

" I don't want you to suspect yourself—but if you *do* vex them?" she could only say, rather helplessly, after a moment; and then all at once the tears came to her eyes.

But he did not see them, fortunately—or at least

she thought he did not see them, for he turned back to an exercise that he had before him, without speaking again, and went on correcting it. And then she lay still, swallowing something that it was imperative on her to swallow; and presently, when he pointed out some fault that she had made, she followed his explanation, and made a remark or two of her own in her usual tone, or at least with no more than a slight touch of sadness in it.

This happened one afternoon. A couple of hours afterwards, however, he brought a little handful of snowdrops to her, and dropped them suddenly on the open page of the book that she was reading.

"There—you reproached us yesterday that we had got you no snowdrops," he said.

"But you told me there were none to get," she answered.

"I only said there were none here."

"Then where have you been for these?" she asked.

But he laughed, and would not tell her. "They are poor little scentless things," he only began to say, scornfully. "I would rather have one violet than a dozen of them. I don't think I will get you any more."

"I didn't want you to get me these," she answered, rather ungraciously. But the next moment she repented of her ungraciousness, and gathered her flowers up tenderly in her hands. "No, I don't mean that. They are pretty, and I like them, and you were very good to bring them," she said quickly. "All flowers can't be like violets. And I think these suit me best, for they are more like me now."

She said the last words not quite aloud, but he heard them, for he looked at her with a look that she did not see. The next moment he sat down at her side, but his face had changed again before he spoke to her.

"I don't see the likeness," he said, quietly. "You are not nearly fair enough to be compared to a snowdrop, and you happily don't droop your head in a snowdrop's meek way. The resemblance is very slight and far fetched, if you can find it at all. A girl does not become like a snowdrop merely because she has got a little pale with lying indoors."

"I have been lying down so long now!" poor Hilary cried, suddenly and sorrowfully. "All these weeks — you don't know how long they seem." And then she turned her head round, and looked up at him all at once, appealingly. "Don't

you think I am going to get any better?" she said, trembling. "It is more than six weeks—and they spoke of only a fortnight at first."

"Undoubtedly you are going to get better," he answered, cheerfully. "You are really getting better every day. Of course Dr. Carter was a little too sanguine with his talk about a fortnight. I suspect he never quite believed, for his own part, that you would be well so soon."

"Then why did he say it?" she asked, quickly.
"It was treating me like a child."

"Doctors are rather afraid of depressing their patients, you know."

"I think it is very foolish. I am glad *you* are not a doctor, and that you don't mind telling the truth."

"How do you know that I don't mind it?" and Mr. Hardy began to laugh. "I am afraid I know a great many things that I say nothing about."

"Things about my illness?"—looking rather alarmed.

"Oh no; I know nothing about your illness that I haven't told you. But your illness, you know, is not the only matter as to which there may be a question of speaking or remaining silent."

She laughed too at this reply; her face, which

had been rather quivering and pitiful for a little while, was beginning to get its natural look again.

"What a thing to say! As if I could suppose that!" she exclaimed. "I know quite well that you conceal a great many things."

"Indeed?" he said.

"You think I don't notice, I suppose? but women notice small things very much, and I am almost a woman now," said Hilary, a little deprecatingly, as if she were aware that that assertion might be questioned.

Mr. Hardy, however, allowed it to pass without dissent.

"That is to say," he merely answered, "you are at a dangerous age, when you begin to see with a woman's eyes, without remembering that you don't bring a woman's experience to guide your judgment? Yes, I know you are; and therefore the soundest advice I can give you is to distrust your own observations."

"But, Mr. Hardy," began Hilary, opening her eyes in protestation——

"Oh, of course I knew you would meet me with a 'but,'" he answered, and laughed, and would carry the discussion no further.

It was true that they were long weeks, as Hilary said; and, used to an active, vigorous life, she pined,

while they lasted, for her health and her liberty. And yet afterwards, when this winter was ended, she used to think that it had been a happy time. It was a long winter, lasting till the bare trees had almost got their leaves again. During March Hilary was allowed to sit up for a little; presently she began to walk, for a few minutes at a time. But it was a slow recovery, and she regained her strength only by almost imperceptible degrees.

She never went downstairs till the winter was quite gone, and her life was passed between her own room and the schoolroom. "It is very dull for you to be so long here, my dear," her father often said kindly to her, and sometimes to herself too it seemed dull when she lay alone, looking out on the woods and the fields where she longed in vain to be; but if she was enough of a child to be easily depressed, she was enough of a child too to be easily comforted, and the boys had but to come in and make the room cheerful with their presence, or Mr. Hardy to sit by her side and talk for ten minutes to her, and the little face would begin to brighten, and the elastic spirits to rise.

And yet it was not at all times now that Mr. Hardy made her glad. He never came to her that she did not welcome him with joy, but he often went away from her leaving her with her childish

heart aching. The pain he gave her was vague enough, but yet she could not argue it away ; it was a kind of chill that he made steal over her—a feeling of separation from him—an indistinct consciousness that he meant them to be separate. He was kind to her almost always, but his kindness had a quality in it that rarely let it warm her ; she used to yearn for it, and cling to it, and treasure it, but often also, when the day was ended, she used to cry over it too.

They were a good deal together while Hilary was lying down, and he talked to her a good deal. This was almost unavoidable, since the schoolroom had become the room in which she mainly lived. Yet he very rarely sought her voluntarily ; they were only together when it would have been unnatural for them to be apart.

During these months she was always very childishly open in her manifestations of regard for him. She used often to let him see that she brightened when he came to her ; but he, on the contrary, gave no signs of her company having any special pleasantness for him. It seldom happened, when they were together, that a looker-on could have thought he had any feeling but of the most ordinary regard for her. He tried to amuse or cheer her, as anyone with common kindness

would have done, but he seldom seemed to go to her for his own delight, or because she was better to him than other women. Only at the rarest times did any hour come when she appeared to draw him to her, and only at the rarest moments did he give her any word or look that might have had their source in another feeling than indifference.

In April, Hilary began to go a little into the garden, but she looked very fragile then. Sometimes her father gave her his arm as she walked round the gravel paths; sometimes it was Cuthbert's arm that aided her, or Mr. Hardy's. As the days got warmer she was able to sit out of doors, and she liked this. She would sit in the sunshine, with her book or her work on her knees, with her cheeks beginning to gain a little colour, but yet with something in her eyes that had not been there six months ago.

Was it only her illness, as the boys supposed, that had made her so much quieter now?

"Hilary, you're awfully weak — aren't you?" Cuthbert said to her, in a half-perplexed tone, one day. "It seems so unnatural for *you* to be sitting this way. Why, you don't even sing. A year ago you were always singing. You never let it alone."

"No—I remember," Hilary said, with a sudden

looking back to that old self of hers, almost in surprise. "But I can sing still. There's no difficulty about that."

And so she began straightway. But somehow her song came differently from the way in which it had come of old, when she had sung for very gladness and lightness of heart. She sang now for a little while, but in ten minutes she became tired, and stopped.

"Yes—you are quieter than you used to be—both quieter and graver. I shall be glad when you are more like yourself again," Mr. Hardy said to her one day.

It was a kind little speech, kindly spoken, but Hilary winced as he made it. The poor little girl had begun by this time, with a frightened half-consciousness of the change that was in her, to wonder tremblingly if she should ever be like herself again—to shrink from her own thoughts—to try to hide something from herself that would not be hidden. It was true that she was daily becoming more quiet, and yet she was angry because Mr. Hardy noticed it.

"You used to tell me that I talked too much. If it is neither right to talk nor to be quiet, then I can never please you," she answered, with sudden petulance.

"But when did I ever tell you that it was right neither to talk nor to be quiet?" he coolly asked. And then, when for a moment she made no reply, "You know I never did. I would as soon try to silence the birds when they were singing, or complain of them when they chose to hold their peace."

"Then why do you say anything about it? Why do you notice me?" she asked, quickly.

"Because I did not know that you objected to be noticed."

"When people are weak and stupid, I don't think that they like to have anything they do spoken about."

"Very well. You shall not have to find fault with me again."

But as soon as he had said this, then the poor little soul began to feel the pangs of remorse. The colour came hurriedly to her face.

"Please forgive me," she said, piteously. "I—I am very fractious."

"You are not well," he answered, kindly.

"Oh, but I oughtn't to speak to you so, whether I am well or not. And I don't mean what I said just now. I don't want you to take no notice of anything. I am grateful to you for noticing. I am indeed, though it seems so little like it."

"Then I will try in future to notice more judiciously," he answered, lightly.

"I am so often cross now. I can't think why I should get so cross," she said, with a sad drop in her voice.

"Don't trouble yourself about it. You won't be cross when you are strong again."

"But it seems to me so dreadful"—sorrowfully.

"It is a very common thing after illness."

"Is it?"—with a ray of hope. "What, to be cross to the people one—one ought to treat the best?"

"Yes, very common."

"Well, I hope it is"—sighing a little. "But it is the worst part of being ill, I think—worse than all the pain."

"Never mind. You will get over it, you may be sure."

"It will be terrible if I don't. Will you go on forgiving me"—all at once, wistfully—"if I say other things to you?"

"You never say anything that I have to forgive, for you never say what makes me angry."

"I don't think you ought to tell me that. I think it would be better if you scolded me."

"But it is not my business to scold you, except when you do your exercises badly."

"You don't do it much, even then. Do you know"—looking up at him suddenly with childish eyes—"I was thinking only yesterday, after I said that lesson badly (for I did say it *very* badly), that perhaps you only let it pass as you did because you thought me not worth correcting."

"Then you were wrong."

"Was I?"—hesitating. "It seemed so to me."

"I let it pass because I saw you were tired. You insisted upon saying it, you know, and as you said it your lips were trembling, and the tears were coming into your eyes."

"And you thought me very foolish?"—quickly.

"Yes, I thought you foolish, if you want me to agree with you. I thought you were in no state to be doing any work."

"I think I had better give my lessons up altogether"—hurriedly and sorrowfully. "There is no good in them now."

"You had better do nothing of the kind. Just go on as you have been doing."

"But I can't go on troubling you so."

"You never trouble me. You have not the power of doing it. Take care"—with a laugh, "your enemy is coming to you again."

"What enemy?" she said, quickly.

"The one you were trying to vanquish a few minutes ago."

She smiled a little, but only rather sadly.

"I think I am getting a great burden to you," she said all at once, simply and pathetically. "I often think that now. And yet I like you to be kind to me. I do like it. When people are weak, they seem to want kindness so very much."

"Yes, more than is good for them," he answered at once.

"Do you think kindness is ever not good?" and Hilary opened her eyes, incredulous.

"Why, do *you* not?"

"No; and I never heard that anybody did."

"Then your experience has been very limited. Kindness is a medicine that may be taken freely in health; but in sickness it needs to be administered with caution."

"I never know when you are jesting. I suppose you are jesting now?"

"Not in the least."

"You wouldn't be kind, you mean, to people who were ill?"

"No, I wouldn't be over-kind to them."

"Then I think you are very hard"—flushing.
"But I suppose you never have been ill yourself? You have never known what it is to be weak and

miserable, and to feel that if other people were not stronger than you are, and didn't care for you and bear with you——”

“Are you taking any tonic yet?” he said, coming in quietly with his inquiry as her sentence began to falter. “(Never mind that other question now.) I should think Dr. Carter would send you away to some more bracing place presently. How do you feel about it yourself? Should you not like to go to the sea?”

The poor pathetic eyes were looking rather blankly at him; the mobile lips were quivering rather pitifully. She thought suddenly of how often he made her feel as though she were asking bread from him, and he gave her a stone.

“I don't know; it doesn't matter,” she said, sadly.

“Are you able to take a little walk? Will you come round the garden with me?”

She hesitated a moment; but after that moment she said, “If you like.” She had been sitting on a chair on the lawn, and he gave her his hand to rise.

“Let us try to get you strong again,” he said cheerfully to her. “If we all help, and you yourself help too, don't you believe that we shall manage it? Only, you see, you don't help always,” he added, “as you might.”

"No," she answered, humbly; "I know that."

"You let yourself be cast down too easily. No doubt it must be hard for you to feel so weak; but you were braver than this at first. Don't lose heart. You are much better—a great deal better. You must surely be aware of that?"

"Oh yes," she said.

"Then what should depress you so much? You ought not to give way. You ought to try not to do it—for the sake of others."

"I don't think anybody cares," she said, half bitterly.

"You cannot really think that."

"I do. Perhaps they might care a little, if they knew; but nobody knows—except—you," said Hilary, almost breaking down on the last word.

"Well, then, *I* care."

A little silence.

"I have hardly the right to ask you to do anything to please me; but you might please me very much, if you would, by trying to be stronger and braver. Will you?"

"I should like to do it"—said timidly, almost below her breath.

"You can at least make an effort."

"Yes."

"Will you do that, then?"

" Yes."

" Well, that is enough ; and now let us talk of something else. I think you might come with me a little beyond the garden—don't you ? Could you walk as far, do you think, as the little wood ?"

" Oh yes—it would be nice."

" So I think, too. And you might teach me a little again about these blackbirds and thrushes."

" I don't believe you will ever learn."

" Nor do I. But still it is a teacher's business, you know, never to lose heart."

They went to the wood, and before their walk ended Mr. Hardy had brought the brightness back to Hilary's face. At the close of it she was gayer perhaps than he was, for she was too much of a child to know how to use concealment, and he could not but perceive that he had it in his power either to sadden her or to make her glad. His own face was more troubled than hers when he left her at an hour's end.



C H A P T E R I X.

HILARY'S TROUBLE.

THE day after Mr. Hardy had had this talk and walk with Hilary, a foreign letter came to him which evidently, after he had read it, very much engrossed his thoughts. Hilary was near him when it was put into his hands, and saw the haste with which he opened it and read its contents. Whatever these contents, too, might be, it was clear they moved him. He read his letter, which was not a long one, more than once, and then remained silent, standing with it in his hand by the mantelpiece, and looking into the fire. Once, after a few minutes, without altering his position, he raised his head suddenly, and for a moment his eyes and Hilary's met. The look he gave her was undecided, enquiring, half-troubled, and yet it had a certain intenseness in it that she saw almost before she saw

the rest. She had been watching him, poor child—as she often did.

After another minute, without speaking, he left the room, and he was in the midst of his ordinary work when she saw him next. They were not much together during the day. He went to the study after dinner, and remained there with her father for some time: then Cuthbert wanted his company for a walk, but he replied, “I have to write for the post,” and went to his own room.

What had there been in that letter to disturb him?—for he *was* disturbed—Hilary thought to herself again and again. She longed to ask him, when, for the first time all day, they happened towards evening to be together. In the twilight he came into the drawing-room, where she was sitting alone, and began to talk to her. Something was said, after a few minutes, about the weather being cold for the time of year, and when she made that remark he answered suddenly—

“It seems to be cold everywhere. It is unusually cold, I heard this morning, in the south of France.”

On which Hilary replied, “Oh!” quickly, and could say no more.

There was a fire in the room, and Mr. Hardy, after a few minutes, sat down in front of it, and presently seemed to forget that Hilary was near

him, or at least she thought he did, for he became silent for what seemed to her a long time. She had been reading when he came in, and she tried to go on with her book by the firelight, and neither of them spoke, till at last he said abruptly—

“Don’t try your eyes like that.”

“I am not trying them,” she answered.

“You need not read at this moment.”

“I don’t want to read,” she said.

“Is that your Hume that you have been studying?”

He stretched out his hand and took the book from her.

“You have got nearly to the middle,” he said, after a moment. “I wonder if you will ever reach the end of it!”

“Do you suppose I shall not?” she asked, in a startled voice.

“I am supposing nothing : I am only wondering,” he answered. “One leaves many a school-book unfinished.”

“Yes,” she said, uneasily ; “but I should not like to think——”

And then she stopped, and did not end her sentence.

He let the silence drop between them again. “What are you thinking about?” she longed to

ask him, but she could not. His manner troubled her. She connected his preoccupation with the letter he had had : she felt so far away from him, as if all his life and all he cared for were something in which she had no part.

He chanced to look at her after a time, and said all at once—

“That is the gown you had on the night I saw you first.”

“Yes—but how can you remember ?” she asked.

“Why should I not remember ?” he answered. “You never wore it all the winter. You had it on that first evening when you came and talked to me in the garden, and a red rose at your throat.”

“Yes, I know,” she said.

There was another pause. The fire hardly needed mending, but he took up the poker and stirred it. And then suddenly, without any preface, he began to speak again.

“You remember that I have told you something before now about my cousin, Arthur Hardy ?” he said, giving just a moment’s glance towards Hilary at his first words. “He is the cousin who lived with us for so long. My father, you know, took pupils, and he was one of them, and we were at Oxford together, and were always very intimate.

You recollect, do you not? Well—I wanted to tell you that I fear he is dying now."

"Oh, I am so sorry!" Hilary exclaimed, with her voice full of pity.

"He is at Hyères. He has never been able to live in England for many years. I was with him the winter before last, and every one thought that the end was coming then; but he rallied again, and of late he has seemed wonderfully well, till now. But now an unexpected change for the worse has come; and I had a letter this morning," said Mr. Hardy, very quietly, "asking me to go to him."

"To go to Hyères?" said Hilary, trembling a little.

"Yes; he is there alone. His father died some years since, and he lost his mother, who had nursed him through all his illness, only a few months ago. I have been uneasy about him ever since her death. But he had seemed so much better that there had even been a talk of his coming home. This has been a very sudden change. I hardly know yet how ill he is. His own letter to-day speaks as if there were no hope; but I have written to his doctor, and asked him to telegraph his real state to me, and I shall have his report on Monday. Things may turn out better

than I fear now. But I thought I would tell you to-night how the case stands," he said, ending in the same quiet tone, "as it is possible I may have to leave you very suddenly."

"Would you go and—*stay* with him? You would not be obliged to stay if he got better?" said poor Hilary, trying to speak as if her voice were not breaking.

"I can hardly tell you that."

"Oh, if he got better, surely you could come back?"

"At this moment it is difficult to make any plans."

"Has he got nobody but you?"—beginning to tremble and falter.

"No one for whom he can send. And, besides, I am bound to him by—special circumstances. If he needs me, I could not refuse to stay with him."

"Oh then, if you say that, you *will* stay! He will get better—and you will never come back again. Oh, I wish you had never come at all!" the poor passionate child cried suddenly, in the pain that she did not know how to bear.

He turned his face away from her—resolutely, with almost a hard look on it.

"Do not speak like this," he said. "Do not

take it in this way—unless you want to hurt me more than you can conceive."

"If it has been any pleasure to us to be together," he said again, after a few moments' silence, "let us be thankful for what happiness we have had. It is not a thing to forget, or to wish that we had never known. If it should be hard to part now, let us help one another. Will you not?" he asked, after another pause, and suddenly turned round and looked at her with a look in his face that, if she had seen it, might have made her glad.

But she did not see it, for she had put up her hand across her eyes.

"I cannot help anybody. What is the good of asking me?" she only began presently to say in a broken voice.

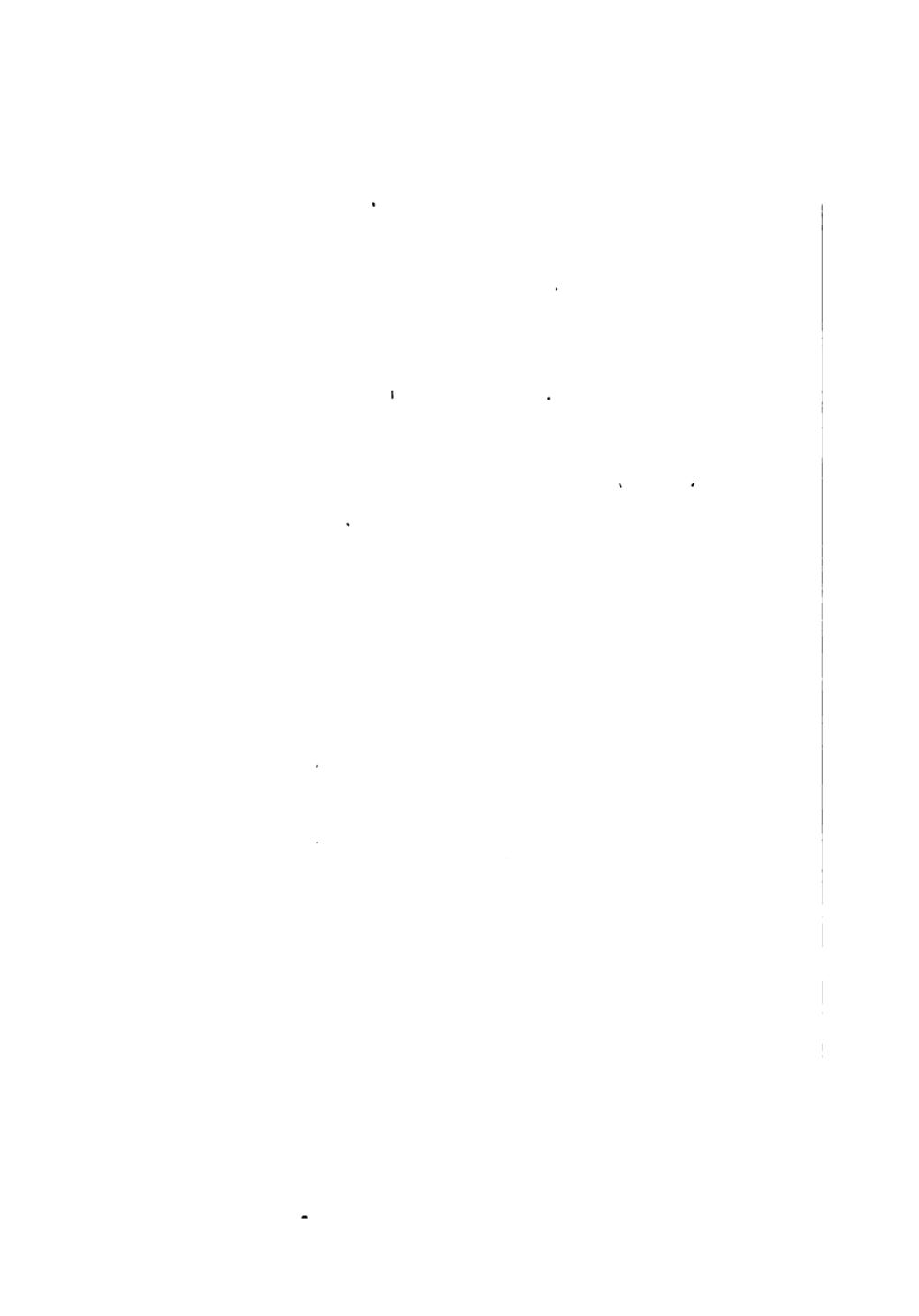
And then, poor soul, she made a pathetic effort to recover herself.

"I don't know why I am crying, except that I am so weak," she whispered, piteously—"and everything seems to try me so. If I said anything just now, I—I didn't mean it," she ended, with a helpless sob.

He rose from his seat, for he could not bear to see her tears. His first impulse seemed to be to leave her without another word, but he was not strong enough to do that. After a minute he



"THE POOR LITTLE FACE LOOKED HURRIEDLY UP AT HIM—THE
CHILDISH FINGERS CAUGHT AT HIS."



came again to her, and suddenly laid his hand on her shoulder as he stood beside her chair.

"Whatever may happen in the future, you have always been dear to me: you are dear now," he said, in a low voice. "If we have to part, do not forget when I am gone that we have been friends. It will be hard for me to go away; but, if I live long enough to have the power to do it, I promise (if you care to have my promise) that I will come back to you."

He was going to turn away after he had said this, but the poor little face looked hurriedly up at him—the childish fingers caught at his.

"You mean, if your cousin should not live? Yes—but he might get better again," she said, quickly—"a great deal better, as you said he did before—and then he wouldn't want you, would he? You would come back then?"

"I cannot tell you," he said.

"But surely he wouldn't want you, if he were really better? He couldn't expect you to stay with him then?—you, who are only his cousin?"

"He has claims on me that I cannot explain to you now. I cannot tell you what I might do if he got better; I can only promise you that, if he does *not* get better, I will come back."

He spoke reluctantly, and she looked wistfully

at him, but said nothing more. The little hand had dropped from his. He stood at her side in silence for a moment or two longer, and then turned away.

It was harder for him than she thought. Those words that he had spoken came back to *her*, and did something to heal the soreness of her heart when he was gone; but *he* carried with him the remembrance of her tears, and of her face with its passionate sad appeal, and he went from the room almost wishing for a moment (as if it were an echo of her wish) that he had never seen her.

"And yet she is such a child that, if I do not come back, she will forget me soon," he said to himself presently. "I may come back and find even in six months that she has forgotten me."





CHAPTER X.

GOOD-BYE.

A SENSE of impending change came quickly over the house. Even the boys felt it, and were a little more subdued next day than usual. It was Sunday, and there were no lessons, and Cuthbert stuck to Mr. Hardy's side all day like his shadow. The lad's loyal young heart was troubled. "I think it's awful for you to be going away, sir," he kept saying. "I don't know how things will go on at all without you."

Mr. Austin was in considerable perplexity too.

"Of course you must go, but I don't know what in the world I am to do with the boys," he said to Mr. Hardy.

"Why not send them to school?" Mr. Hardy urged. "I wish I could get you to feel that that

would be the best thing for them. For my own part, I think it is hardly even fair to them to keep them at home any longer."

"If you could have stayed with them for another year or two, I could have asked nothing better for them than that."

"But it has been put out of my power to stay."

"Yes—and of course in the future you will be doing no more of this sort of work. That is to say, if your cousin should not recover; but, if he should recover—well, say partially—do you think there would be no chance that you would come back to us?"

"I think not," Mr. Hardy said quietly.

"It would be a very great boon to us if you would, you know; only—ah, to be sure—I was forgetting," he added hurriedly. "I—I suppose it would hardly do."

And then he sighed. His last words referred to something that Mr. Hardy had said to him on the preceding day, when the two men had had a long talk together.

"And therefore, if you can make up your mind to send the boys to a good public school, I think you will be doing the best thing for them that is possible," Mr. Hardy said, with emphasis.

"Well, it may be so; I am not sure that it will

not have to end so," Mr. Austin replied, and returned to his study with a troubled face.

He was not the kind of man who ought to have burdened himself with children, for they were not much to him except a thorn in the flesh. He had been rather at ease about these sons of his for the last nine months, but now the old trouble was to come back again. "They had better go. They had better go. I don't see anything else for it. One is never safe from this sort of thing. It might happen again a second time," he thought to himself in an injured, vexed way.

The day was a sad and silent one to Hilary.

The others went to church without her. Then Cuthbert attached himself to Mr. Hardy, and kept possession of him the whole afternoon. They went for a long walk; the other boys were out of doors too. It seemed already a little foretaste of the time when all the house should be empty.

She sat for a long while at one of the windows that commanded the furthest view across the fields, watching to see some of them come back; but she watched in vain, till she was weary, for the tea-bell had rung before any of them came.

"We have had a long walk; we have been as far as the Stepping Stones," Mr. Hardy told her, when he and Cuthbert returned at last.

"Yes; I thought you must have gone a long way," she replied, rather sadly.

He could not but understand her tone. The little face looked wistful and weary; but she thought he did not care, and that he was hard, when he turned away without saying anything to cheer her.

He let Cuthbert keep still by his side when tea was over, though, had he pleased, he could easily enough have dismissed him, as poor Hilary knew. "But he does not want to be with me, because I cried last night, and he thinks I should begin to cry again, and vex him," she said to herself, with fresh tears of humiliation in her eyes.

She heard Cuthbert's voice talking eagerly in the garden, as she sat on the lawn alone. After a long time had passed, he and Mr. Hardy joined her together. She was sitting on a garden seat, where there was room for three, and they sat down beside her. They were in the midst of an argument, and, almost without any pause, after they had joined her, they went on with it.

Presently Mr. Hardy began to try and make her take part in their talk. He asked her questions, and made her answer them; he would not let her be silent.

"You look tired, Hilary," Cuthbert said once;

and when Cuthbert made that remark, instead of letting her answer for herself, Mr. Hardy answered for her.

"Yes, she is tired because she has been too much alone. She is tired, not because she wants rest, but because she wants amusement. Is not that the case?" he said. "I wish we could have had you with us in our walk this afternoon."

"I wonder if I shall ever go for long walks again!" poor Hilary said suddenly.

"Of course you will; don't speak as if you thought there was any doubt about it. You don't know how many a walk together we may have yet."

"When—when you come back from Hyères?" she said.

She gave a little smile. She was saying to herself—"I will try not to be stupid, and vex him any more."

"Yes, when I come back from Hyères—perhaps."

"Only you don't know when that will be," Cuthbert broke in.

"No."

"And it seems rather dreadful to be thinking of it," said the boy, quickly.

"Oh yes; don't let us do that," cried Hilary. "One gets so selfish," she said, deprecatingly,

turning to Mr. Hardy the next moment ; "but I do care about your cousin. I hope he will get better."

"I know you do," he said, quietly. And then, after a little silence—"He has had a long time of it, poor fellow!—more than six years," he said, abruptly. "The end has seemed near more than once, but he has always had a wonderful amount of rallying power in him. The mere wish to live seems always to have kept him alive."

"Then it may keep him alive still."

"I think it is possible."

"How old is he, sir ?" Cuthbert asked.

"He is a few months younger than I am. He is just thirty-one."

"And is he like you at all ?" It was Hilary who put this question. "I mean," she explained, "does he care for the same sort of things ?"

"You mean, that is, does he care for books ? for I think"—with a moment's laugh—"they are the only things you ever suspect *me* of caring for. Well—no, he does not care for books particularly. When he was a boy he was a great cricketer and football player, and at Oxford he was great at rowing. He never troubled himself about doing very much work. But he was a brilliant fellow," said Mr. Hardy, warmly. "He was one of those

men who gain everything they want almost without an effort."

"Then he took a good degree, I suppose, sir, in spite of his idleness?" Cuthbert asked.

"Yes—fairly good."

"As good as you did?"

"Not quite. But he might have beaten me easily if he had chosen."

"Yes—but if you worked, and he did not, you deserved more than he did," said Hilary, quickly. "I am glad you stood highest. I don't think it would have been fair if it had gone the other way."

"It was perhaps of most consequence to me to stand where I did, for he had not, like me, to make his living by his brains—happily for him, poor fellow, for a year after he left Oxford this illness began."

"Is it consumption?"

"Yes. There is consumption in his mother's family. She herself escaped it, but two of her brothers and a sister died of it before they were thirty, as poor Arthur is dying now."

There was a little silence, and then Hilary said, suddenly and shyly—

"When one hears of great troubles like that, it makes one ashamed of ever being unhappy about little things."

Mr. Hardy made no answer. It was Cuthbert, after a moment or two, who said sententiously—

“‘Whom the gods love die young.’”

And then Mr. Hardy laughed.

“The gods, I hope, love a few more of us than those,” he answered. “It would be a more bitter world than it is if that saying covered the whole truth.”

“But yet so many of the best do seem to die early,” Hilary said, quickly.

“And do you not think that there are more that live? I imagine, if you consider it, that you will find we are disposed in our sorrow to count the fruit that falls to the ground more accurately than the apples that remain upon the tree. Come, the sun has set, and this grass is getting damp. If you want to be out longer, come to the path and walk.”

He rose up, and the others rose too.

“Do you want to go in? I think it is too early yet. Wrap your shawl about you, and let us have another quarter of an hour,” he said.

They began to walk up and down upon the gravel. After a few minutes Cuthbert went away, and then Mr. Hardy began to talk again about his cousin, and about their life together when they had both been boys. Presently they came back

to the house, and Hilary sat down under the porch. She sat there listening, and asking now and then a few questions. Mr. Hardy had got into a vein of talk, and went on for a long time, almost without pausing.

It was all so quiet, and kind, and soothing, that insensibly, as the twilight crept on, that pain which had been making the poor child's heart ache all day, grew still; the sense of loneliness passed away; the terror of the empty future when he should be gone grew less at least, if it did not cease. Hope came and mingled with her fear. Had he not told her that he would come back?—and that he liked her? she thought.

They became silent at last.

"Am I keeping you here too long?" he asked suddenly, and turned and looked down into her face.

"Oh no!" she answered quickly.

"We ought to come in now, I suppose."

But yet, though he said that, he lingered still a little longer.

"I shall often think of you all when I am away," he began to say, abruptly, after a minute's silence; "and of you most of all. You have helped to make these months that I have lived with you a time that I shall never forget. I wish that I could

leave you stronger ; but you will get strong soon, I think, if you will keep the promise that you gave me a day or two ago. You remember it—do you not ? I should like you to tell me again that you will keep it when I am gone ?”

“ Do you mean, what you said to me about trying to be brave ?” She spoke in a blank tone that had a curious touch of pathos in it. “ Yes, I said that I would be brave, if I could. But I don’t know how I can be now, when I shall have no one to help me.”

There was a little silence before Mr. Hardy said very quietly—

“ Would it be any help to you to think that you were doing it for me ?”

“ Yes,” she answered instantly, and almost tremulously. She lifted up her eyes for one moment, with the colour rushing to her face.

“ Then let my wish act as a motive to you. When you are tempted to be a coward, think that if you yield you will disappoint me.”

“ Oh, may I ? Should you really mind ?”

“ I should mind very much.”

“ Then I will try—I will try hard—not to vex you.”

“ Try hard for a little while, and it will gradually become easy to you. And, if you fail, try again.

Why, think of what you were six months ago," he said, suddenly and cheerfully. "Think what a happy, fearless girl you were. When I am away, you know, that old bright Hilary will be the one I shall think of most. When I come back (if I come), let her be the one that I shall find again."

She gave rather an unsteady smile, but made no answer ; she only said, after a few moments—

"I wish everything did not seem so hard."

"But everything does *not* seem hard," he replied instantly. "Only one or two things are hard, and it is largely in our own power to make even those few easier. If it is hard to part now, let us think that it has been good to be together."

"Yes, that has been good for *me*," answered Hilary, suddenly, with a quiver in her voice. "You know what we were when you came, and all that you have done for us since——"

She could not finish her sentence. There came a little break at the last words, and then she stopped, and he made no answer to her. He only said after a few moments—

"Let us come in now."

And then she rose, and they went into the house.

The next day, by Mr. Hardy's wish, his pupils all began their work with him as usual, but in the

middle of the morning the telegram he expected was brought to him.

He opened it as Hilary was doing some lesson by his side, and without speaking, when he had read it, quietly passed it on to her. It merely said—

“ You had better come at once.”

She sat for a few moments with her eyes looking at the words, and with a lump coming into her throat. Then Mr. Hardy gave the paper to Cuthbert.

“ I shall have to start to-night,” he said ; “ but let us go on now ; I have time enough.”

And he would have continued the work he had been doing with Hilary, but, with one mute look in his face, she closed the book. And then Cuthbert came to his side, and—

“ I don't think we can do any more lessons, sir,” he said abruptly. “ I feel as if they had all gone out of my head.”

“ Well, clear the table, then,” Mr. Hardy answered, and rose up.

“ I will go and see your father,” he said next moment ; and without even glancing at Hilary he left the room.

The boys began in unusual silence to gather up their books, and Hilary stole away, feeling for the

moment as if it was too hard to bear. She went to her own room. She hardly knew how the next minutes passed; she was almost stunned. "To-night!—in a few hours!" she kept repeating to herself, and that was all. She could not grasp the thing that had come to her; it was so great that it overwhelmed her—so bitter that it seemed incredible.

She saw nothing more of Mr. Hardy until dinner, and during dinner he talked for the most part to her father. But in the course of the afternoon he came into the schoolroom, and sat for a good while there arranging papers, and talking to her and Cuthbert.

He pleased her by telling her that he was going to leave his books behind him—"if you will give them house room—as I think you will?" he said, with a kind look that comforted the poor sore heart. She sat watching him while he did his work, looking very sad and childish, but saying very little, and not vexing him with any tears. It was not any sense of what was demanded from her by womanly dignity that made her exert so much self-control as this, but only her desire not to trouble him. He would be distressed, she said to herself, if she cried, and so she tried hard not to cry.

"Shall I take care of your things while you are away?" she said wistfully to him once. "I should like to do that—if you will let me. I will make a list of all your books."

"That would be taking far too much trouble," he answered.

But she shook her head, and would not be satisfied till he agreed that she might do it.

"I should like you to make me accountable for all you leave," she said; "and then you shall find everything in order—when you come again."

"Very well; then I will make you accountable," he replied at last.

He was in the room with her and Cuthbert for an hour or two, during which, however, they exchanged only now and then a few sentences of desultory talk, as he went over his papers, and made the various arrangements necessary for his departure; and then after that they hardly met again.

They had tea at their usual hour of six o'clock; at half-past seven Mr. Hardy took the train to London. The boys walked down to the station with him, but Hilary parted from him as he left the house. She stood on the doorstep, and gave her hand to him there, with lips that trembled too much for her to speak.

Perhaps she had hoped for some last words from him that she might remember afterwards—for some final kindness to add to the number of the kindnesses that were gone ; but, if she had expected this, she had to bear disappointment, for he only looked at her for a moment, and briefly said, "Good-bye," and scarcely pressed her hand with a warmer pressure before he turned away than he might have given it at a common parting.





CHAPTER XI.

HILARY'S SOLITUDE.

A FRESH life began for Hilary, after Mr. Hardy went away—a life that, as far as outward circumstances went, was no more than a return to what former years had made familiar, but that in reality, in the inner spirit of it, was altogether new and strange. For she who was set to live again in this old routine was a changed Hilary—no longer the light-hearted girl who had been contented to spend day after day with her brothers in boyish play, but a creature who had emerged suddenly and almost violently out of childhood into the knowledge that she was a woman.

Perhaps, if Mr. Hardy had not extracted the promise that he did from her, she would have let herself break down after he was gone, for she had not much courage at this time ; she was still very

sensitive and very weak ; but because he had told her that she must be brave, she tried to obey him with all the strength that she could muster—failing and trying again, and failing and still again trying, with a patience and loyalty that it would have touched him perhaps to see.

Of course, the struggle was hardest at the beginning. She became gradually stronger as the summer went on, and then most things were easier to her. It even grew easier then to wait week after week without more than the scantiest news of Mr. Hardy. He had written when he first reached Hyères, and had told them that he had already on his arrival found his cousin better, and a month later he wrote again, and said that the improvement on the whole continued. That second letter was to Cuthbert, and the boy answered it ; but, after his reply, Mr. Hardy did not for a long time write again. " His cousin will live, and then he will not come back," Hilary told herself a thousand times ; and it required all her little strength, and often more strength than she had, to make her content that it should be so.

The boys had been sorry at first when their tutor left them, but with all of them, as may be supposed, except Cuthbert, their sorrow had been short-lived. To Harry, and Dick, and Bob, a return to sudden

and unexpected idleness was a delight too great to be outweighed by any sentimental regrets. They were wholly reconciled to their tutor's departure, I fear, in less than four-and-twenty hours after his back was turned.

"I wonder what the Governor means to do next?" they said to one another; and the prospect of being handed over to another master, who might prove on the whole less satisfactory than Mr. Hardy had done, touched them with a little natural anxiety, which, however, was quite unable to depress their buoyant spirits long. A present good was given to them by the gods, and they were too wise not to accept it joyously.

But Cuthbert had cared too much for Mr. Hardy, and had been too much moulded by his influence, to shake off his regret for him as the others did.

"I don't know how we shall get on without him. I feel as if I didn't know what to do or where to turn to," he said to Hilary on the first day after his tutor went.

And then they fell to talking together about him.

"He told me I was to go on working by myself," the boy said, "till the Governor got something settled—and of course I shall do it; but I don't know how I'm to get on alone—so as to do any good, I mean."

"You see, you may have to wait a good while—that makes it so difficult," Hilary said, anxiously "Papa can't do anything, of course, till he knows if Mr. Hardy is coming back."

"But Mr. Hardy *isn't* coming back," said Cuthbert.

"Oh yes, he is—if his cousin dies."

"Not to teach us," exclaimed the boy.

"Yes, he is; why shouldn't he?"

But Cuthbert shook his head.

"I think you're wrong," he maintained, stoutly. "He didn't say a word to *me* about coming back any more—except to see us, of course. Perhaps," he added, reflectively, after a moment, "he thought the Governor wouldn't wait for him."

"But he *would* wait, don't you think?"

"I don't know," said Cuthbert, doubtfully. "I don't know what he is thinking of doing at all; and I don't quite like to ask him, for fear of riling him. I wish *you* would."

"Oh, I will, certainly," answered Hilary, readily.

And she did ask Mr. Austin before many hours were past.

"Papa, what are you going to do about the boys?" she said to him. "Won't Mr. Hardy come back—if his cousin dies?"

"No, certainly not," Mr. Austin replied at once,

in a tone of surprise. "That would be a very strange thing for him to do."

"A strange thing! Why?" exclaimed Hilary, opening her eyes in extreme amazement.

And then her father looked at her.

"Do you not know the change that his cousin's death will make to him?" he said.

"No," she answered.

"He is his cousin's heir. His uncle made a good fortune, and this young man who is dying has neither brother nor sister."

"I did not know he was rich." Hilary spoke in a startled and almost a regretful tone. "Then if he dies," she added, after a moment's silence, "Mr. Hardy won't need to work?"

"I imagine not."

"But—he may not die?"

"No, he may linger on for years. That makes the difficulty."

"So, if he lives, Mr. Hardy will stay with him, you think?—and if he dies——?" faltering a little.

"If he dies, Mr. Hardy will be his own master. That is how the case seems to stand."

"And, anyway"—in a tone of involuntary dejection—"he will never come again—to live—here?"

"No, I should say not. It seems very improbable."

And then there was a sudden silence. The news Hilary had heard had startled her. She could hardly think of Mr. Hardy as a rich man. She was glad—and yet she felt as if she should be jealous of any kind of change in him. And her hope of his return, too—was it indeed wholly gone?

“Why did he tell me that he would come back if his cousin died, Papa?—for he did tell me so,” she said, suddenly and almost sharply.

“Well—because, I suppose, he *will* come back,” Mr. Austin answered, a little grimly. “He said the same to me, so apparently he means to do it.”

“But that would be—only to see us?”

“I imagine so; but I asked him no questions.”

“You said, though—did you not?—that we should be glad,” asked Hilary, hesitating, but eager: and then her father gave an odd but rather a sad smile.

“Should you like, for one, Hilary, to see him again?” he said, suddenly. And the next moment, without waiting for an answer, “Well, if he comes, I shall be glad to have you pleased; but, remember, he may not come. His cousin may get better.”

“Oh yes—I know,” she replied, quickly.

And then nothing more was said till, after a few minutes had passed, she returned to the question she had asked at the beginning.

"Then, Papa, what do you mean to do about the boys?"

And on that Mr. Austin almost groaned.

"I am pretty well at my wits' ends about them," he said, impatiently. "Mr. Hardy could scarcely have left me at a more awkward time. I suppose I shall end by sending them to school; but I can't even do that at this moment, with the long holidays so near at hand. It would be useless to let them go in the middle of a school's last term."

"How would it do to send them to the Curate," said Hilary, "just for a month or two?"

"The Curate is a goose," replied Mr. Austin.

But yet the suggestion seemed to him, when he reflected on it, not without a certain amount of wisdom. The Rev. Mr. Symonds might in some respects be a goose, but at least he was a university man, and he knew Greek and Latin. He was also desirous of taking pupils, which was the case with no other man in the neighbourhood.

"I might send them to him for a few weeks, certainly. It would at any rate be a better thing for them than to be running wild," Mr. Austin thought to himself. "And in the autumn I suppose I had better take Hardy's advice. I daresay I am only one of the many fools," he said, with rather a bitter laugh, "who have worn themselves

out in trying to do what fails to benefit anybody in the end."

He said nothing to the youngsters for a few days ; but at the end of that time he, one evening, told them the blessing that was in store for them.

"Bob," he said abruptly that evening before they went to bed, addressing his second son—"what have your occupations been to-day?"

"My occupations?" echoed Bob, startled, and turning very red.

"Yes—what have you been doing?"

"Nothing particular," replied Bob, indignantly.

"Have you been working?"

"N—o."

"Have you been playing?"

"Yes."

"Have you been playing every day since Mr. Hardy went?"

"Y—es."

"And the rest of you, I presume, have done the same? What does Cuthbert say?"

"I have done a little work, sir," replied Cuthbert, modestly.

"And you three have done none? Well—this is Saturday; you have had a week of unexpected idleness; now on Monday you go back to your books. I have arranged with Mr. Symonds that

you shall go to him at nine o'clock on Monday morning."

"To Mr. Symonds!" cried Bob and Dick together, almost with a gasp, and even Cuthbert looked aghast.

"This is a temporary arrangement, not a permanent one. After the holidays you will probably go to school."

"Oh!" cried the three young ones, in various accents, and Cuthbert said heartily, "I'm very glad, sir."

"Why are you glad, my boy?" his father asked, glancing at him; and then, a little shyly, Cuthbert said that he knew it was what Mr. Hardy would think best—that Mr. Hardy liked schools.

"And so you think more of his opinion than of your father's, do you?" Mr. Austin replied drily.

But the next moment, when Cuthbert looked a little abashed, and tried hastily to mutter some denial, he added kindly—

"Well, you have every reason to think a good deal of it. I shouldn't wish you to do otherwise. If I send you to school, I shall be taking his advice too myself, you see."

"I don't think we should get on with any tutor after Mr. Hardy; I can't fancy that we could," Cuthbert said suddenly. "I should like to go to

school now, since he is gone. I should like to go to Rugby. I would work hard if you sent me there."

"I believe you would, my lad," Mr. Austin answered heartily. "You have got to the point at last—and I have to thank Mr. Hardy for it—when I can trust you not to throw your opportunities away. These last six months, Cuthbert, have begun to make a man of you." And then he put his hand on Cuthbert's shoulder, and the quick blood came to the boy's face.

The house became very quiet presently, when the lads began every morning to go to their new tutor. Hilary missed the sound of the young voices, and the tramp of the noisy feet, and did not like it. "And if it seems dull now, what will it be presently?" she often thought.

"You will miss these troublesome young rascals when they go away, I am afraid, Hilary," her father said to her one day; and she answered—"Oh yes, I shall miss them; but—but it can't be helped," she added bravely, or at least with an effort to be brave.

A little while before the boys' school life began, there came another letter from Mr. Hardy, but it had little news in it. His cousin had rallied considerably: there seemed at any rate to be no near likelihood of his death.

"Why, he may live for years!" Cuthbert exclaimed, almost indignantly, when he read it. "I think it too bad. If I were Mr. Hardy, I should bolt."

"But he is fond of his cousin. You forget how fond he is of him," Hilary objected.

"Oh, well—of course, if he's fond of him, that alters the question," Cuthbert admitted; "but still, I do think it's abominable to be kept hanging on like that. You see, he must feel so queer. I think they both must, for that matter—the one knowing that he ought to die, and the other—well, the other, I suppose, not knowing whether he wants him to die or not."

"Oh, Cuthbert, don't say that! He *does* know!" Hilary exclaimed. "If his cousin were to get well he would be glad."

"Yes, but it isn't a question of getting well: everybody knows he can't do that. If I were his cousin, I know what I would do," said Cuthbert, with decision. "I'd cut my money in two, and give him half of it at once."

"But perhaps Mr. Hardy wouldn't take it," Hilary answered. "We can't tell. We know so little about him altogether," said the girl, with a suppressed sigh.

The boys went away, and Hilary was left to her

solitude, and the days seemed very long to her. She had grown much stronger by this time ; but yet, though she had recovered much of her strength, she had not recovered her old light-heartedness. The things that she had cared for a year ago seemed without flavour to her now. She had no companions to make merry with (supposing even that she had wanted merriment) ; the house was silent and empty ; the old happy schoolroom was desolate. She used to have a fire lighted in that room, and would sit there, with her books about her, trying rather wearily to go on with the lessons that she had learnt before in such dear company ; but she could not do it. She was no lover of books in reality ; she had only loved her work for the sake of the master who had incited her to do it ; and now that he was gone, all that had given her energy and desire to learn was gone too. She used to read the closely-filled pages of her lesson-books with thoughts far away. They had all become dull and wearisome to her, because his hand was no longer here to guide her, nor his voice to give her encouragement.

"There is no good in it. I am so stupid. I can't do anything," she said to herself at last.

"You miss the boys, Miss Hilary," old Sarah

often said, sympathetically, to her—"and goodness knows but I miss them too, for, what with their dirty feet, and the racket they were always a-making everywhere, the house isn't like the same place without them. And Mr. Hardy was a nice civil gentlemen, too, as ever stepped—that he was ; and I wish that he and the whole lot of them were back again, for, my dear, you look like a ghost, a-sitting here all alone."

Hilary used to spend her days for the most part by herself, but almost from the time of her brothers' departure it came to be her habit to pass her evenings in her father's study. He was thoughtful enough of her to ask her to come and sit with him, so she used to take her book (not a lesson-book, but generally something more entertaining) when tea was over, and curl herself up in an arm-chair by his fire, and read there quietly for hours.

They were very silent evenings, but occasionally Mr. Austin would read a little to his daughter, and as time went on he even seemed to take some pleasure in talking to her. Hilary, subdued as she was now, suited him better as a companion than she had done a year ago. She had been a hoyden then, and he had a terror of hoydens ; but now she was quiet, and not without sense, he found, and

that little face of hers had something in it that by degrees he came to look at often.

"You are growing like your mother, my dear," he said to her, suddenly, one night.

"Was it only those boys who used to make you so wild, Hilary?" he asked her another time; and one day, after he had been standing by her side for a few moments, he called her his "little companion," and stooped down suddenly to lay his head upon her hand.





CHAPTER XII.

THE END OF THE STORY.

THE autumn passed away and winter began, and when the boys came home for their winter holidays the house got astir again with its old life. There were happy gatherings once more in the schoolroom ; merry skatings on the frozen ponds ; there was the sound of young voices all day in the air. "Oh, boys," said Hilary, fervently, "it's nice to have you back again."

For she had brightened up at their return into something that almost seemed like the Hilary of a year ago ; she was a creature not made for loneliness ; she had gradually regained her strength during the past months, and now, with the young, familiar life once more around her, her own life seemed to come back, and the quick blood to flow

through her veins again. And yet she was not the old Hilary, but something tenderer and sweeter. She would join the boys still in their games, and be happy with them ; their companionship roused her, and brought back the spring to her step and the lightness to her laugh : but yet she was not one with them as she had been a year ago ; she had left them on the road behind her somewhere in this past year, and had travelled on into another world than theirs.

"Has there been no news from Mr. Hardy?" Cuthbert asked when he first came home. "I haven't heard a word, but I thought perhaps he would have written to the Governor."

"No, he has never written," Hilary answered, sadly.

She had been waiting and longing for tidings of him for months, but no tidings had come.

A week after the boys' return, however, Cuthbert came rushing one morning into the dining-room, where she was sitting, with an open letter in his hand, and a face bursting with news.

"Hilary," he said, "he's dead!"

She saw who the letter was from ; she did not need to ask who "he" meant.

"Yes—he's gone at last," the boy cried. "I am glad."

"Oh, Cuthbert, don't say so ! It sounds so cruel," Hilary exclaimed ; but yet the news was making her own heart leap up too. She took the letter from Cuthbert's hand and read it, quivering over every line. "Oh, how good he is!" she said once, almost with a break in her voice.

"Yes, he must have been a comfort to that fellow, I should think," answered Cuthbert. "What an awful illness—wasn't it ? I used to think it was quite easy to die of consumption. Well, nobody need be sorry that he is gone, I am sure. You see even Mr. Hardy does not pretend to be."

"No ; he says he is glad ; but that is because he suffered so."

"Well ; and if he was obliged to suffer, surely it is a good thing that it is over ? I wonder now when Mr. Hardy will come home !"

"Yes ; I wonder. He does not say a word."

"It will be sure to be soon, I should think. He can't have anything to keep him out there. I hope he may turn up before we go back to school."

It was a month from the time at which the boys were to go back to school, but the weeks went past and brought them no tidings of Mr. Hardy's intended movements. Day after day Hilary

watched and hoped, saying very little ; but she watched and hoped in vain.

" Well—he won't come now in time for us, I suppose," Cuthbert said, when the day of their departure was near at hand. The boy was sorry. " I should have liked awfully to see him again. Mind you tell him, Hilary," he said.

" But I may not see him either. Perhaps he may not come yet for a long time. We can't tell. He may be busy," Hilary answered, a little wearily.

" Oh, I don't think he will be very long now. And I say, Hilary, if he does come, you might make him promise to come back again at Easter. Why, he can do anything he likes, you know, now. He's a lucky fellow. I wish *I* had a cousin to leave a fortune to me," said Cuthbert.

" Yes—it must be very nice for him. I wonder if he is happy!" Hilary had thought to herself already a thousand times.

" Oh, I wish he would write again !" she began to think passionately after the boys had gone away. She grew very weary of waiting when they were gone ; she used to watch for a letter from him every day, but no letter came.

The winter went slowly on, and began to pass away : since their last news from him she could

count months now, not weeks, and yet the long silence remained unbroken. "It seems to me that Mr. Hardy is in no great hurry to pay his promised visit to us," Mr. Austin said to her one evening, with rather a chuckle in his tone.

But Mr. Hardy had not forgotten them. One February day Hilary had been out, and was returning home sadly enough in the early spring twilight, when some one, overtaking her along the road, suddenly touched her arm, and she turned round to see Mr. Hardy by her side.

The joyful blood rushed to her face.

"Oh—you have come at last!" she said half aloud. That was the only greeting.

"Yes; have you been looking for me?" he answered; and then he took her hand and held it for a few moments, while he looked at her. "I might have come before, only I couldn't bear to do it," he said presently, after they had begun to walk on together. "I couldn't bear to come here straight from that poor fellow's deathbed. I hoped you would understand that. But you have *not* understood it, I suspect?"—and he looked at her again. "I see in your face that you have not."

"Never mind. I was afraid—that was all. I—I am so glad now," she said.

“What were you afraid of?”

“I only thought—you might never come at all.”

“Well, you see, that was a very groundless fear. And if you cared in the least about my coming, you ought never to have entertained it, after what I said to you. You ought to have been sure that I should come. How are they all?”

“Oh, very well. There is nobody at home, you know, but Papa and me.”

“That must make it dull for you.”

“Yes, it has been a little dull, but it doesn’t matter now. And—are *you* well too?”—with a timid glance at him. “I think you look brown.”

“I *am* brown. I am come from a place where the sun shines.”

“From Hyères?”

“No—I left Hyères some time ago. I have been in Italy—in Florence and Verona. I will tell you all about it presently. Is your father at home?”

“Yes, I left him an hour ago. He will be so glad to see you.”

“Will he?”—with a half laugh. “I am not so sure of that.” And then, before she could answer him—“Will you give me a bed to-night, if I want to stay?”

"*If you want?*"—in rather a wondering voice.

"Well, will you give me a bed"—laughing—"without any *ifs*?"

"Surely you are not thinking of staying only one night?" she said wistfully, with the childish face getting a troubled look—"after you have been away so long?"

"We need not settle that this moment; need we?"

"What have you done with your luggage? Have you not got some luggage with you?"

"Yes, I have got a bag at the station."

"And will they send it up?"

"If I don't return for it."

"I don't know what you mean!"

And then, at her puzzled face and voice, he laughed again.

"They will send it if they don't see me back within the next few hours. I told them to keep it till after nine."

"In case you should go back to-night? I think you are very—strange," she said slowly, in a disturbed tone.

"I am not strange at all. I did not say that I wished to go back to-night."

"Then did you think that *we* should wish not to keep you?"

"I was not sure. I thought it was quite possible that you might not."

She turned a reproachful look on him. He saw a quiver come to her lip.

"How could I tell? I don't think now that you want to send me away; but I was not sure of that half-an-hour ago."

"You ought to have been sure"—timidly.
"I—I don't understand you."

"Shall you understand me any better if I tell you that I will do whatever you like?"

"Oh yes!"—with quick joyfulness.

"Very well; then I leave you to make what arrangements you please. Settle it your own way."

"If you say that"—gladly—"you know how it will be settled. I think"—shyly—"you have been only saying this to tease me?"

"You have often accused me of saying things to tease you, when I have never had the remotest intention of doing anything of the sort. I am afraid"—half in jest—"you have not grown so much wiser during these nine months as I had expected that you would do."

"Did you think I should have grown much wiser?"—with a little happy laugh. "I don't much believe that you did."

"I used to speculate about it."

"Did you?"—doubtfully.

"Yes, very often. Why should I not? When there was so much room for improvement, was it not natural?"

"I don't believe that you either thought or cared much. You had other things to think about."

"Yes, I had many things to think about. You are right there. I had much to think about—and much to trouble me."

"I know you had"—earnestly. "And I—I should not have said what I did just now"—with sudden self-reproach.

"About my not having cared to think of you, you mean? No, you should not. You should never say untrue things. How is that lad Cuthbert?"

"Oh, he is very well, and working hard."

"I am glad of that. He has not forgotten me, I hope?"

"Forgotten you? I should think not!"

"Ah, the shortness of memory is only supposed to be upon *my* side, I see."

"Please don't say that"—quickly.

"You should not force me to say it, then. But I am glad Cuthbert keeps his old regard for

me. I have some thought of taking a run to see him."

"It would make him very happy if you did."

But Hilary gave a little sigh as she said this. Did he care for Cuthbert's regard, the foolish, self-tormenting heart began to ask itself, and not for hers?

"I have my hands full just now, but I may try and look after him in a week or two. What a quiet house you must have without those four youngsters!"

"Oh yes; it is very quiet—too quiet."

"I am sure it is, by the tone in which you say that. I don't think loneliness is very good for you."

"I don't like it much—at least."

"No—you never did like it. You never liked silence. I always used to accuse you, you know, of having a supreme faculty for chattering."

"We all used to chatter a great deal. The house was very different a year ago from what it has been of late."

"I can believe that. Well, you must talk to *me* now. I have come back with a great desire to be talked to." And he laughed as he spoke, but there was something in his tone that made the colour come to her face.

They had almost reached the house. In another minute—

"I see Papa is in. There is a light in his room," Hilary said.

So then Mr. Hardy went to the study, and stayed there till the tea-bell rang.

The surprise of his return had been so sudden and great that she was almost too agitated to be wholly happy yet; but her face was very bright when the two men entered the dining-room together.

"Hilary is pretty well again, you see," Mr. Austin said abruptly, as he glanced at her.

"She is more than pretty well, it seems to me. She is as well as I ever saw her," Mr. Hardy answered, quickly, but quietly.

"Will you take your old seat again?" Hilary asked, with a nervous tone in her voice.

They all three spent the evening in talk. It was not like the evenings of former days, when the five young heads had sat bending over their lesson-books together: to-night they sat by the fire in Mr. Austin's study, and four of the old company were gone; yet it was a happy evening, and Hilary, in her deep content and gratitude, thanked God for it at the end, when she said her prayers.

"I think the sun is shining because you have come," she said to Mr. Hardy next morning with a light in her eyes. "We have had no sunshine for days; but is it not beautiful now? I think it can hardly be more beautiful than this down in the south.

"Ah, you know nothing about the south," he answered to this assertion; but the next moment, when she looked disappointed — "It is not so beautiful here as there, but this place is dearer to me than any I have seen since I went away," he said, suddenly and cordially.

They passed almost all this day together. He said nothing more about going away. Mr. Austin went to his study and left them alone, and they rambled about the gardens, and sat and talked in the schoolroom; and it was like the old days, Hilary said once, and then faltered suddenly, with a happy and yet almost an incredible feeling that this day for her was like no other day that had ever dawned.

For Mr. Hardy had been reserved with her of old, and he had ceased to be reserved now; he had been cold to her, but his eyes and his tones to-day spoke a new language; he looked at her as a man only looks at the woman whom he loves; he made her feel that he was taking her into his

heart and into his life. And then towards evening the happy end came very quietly.

They were alone together ; they had been talking about a great many things ; they had been recalling a hundred trifles, dear to them both, that had happened in the time that he had lived with them.

" How good you were to me—how patient you were with me when I was ill ! " she said at last. " I have often wanted since to thank you, for I never thanked you at the time ; and I think I must have been a great burden and trouble to you."

" Is that the conclusion you have come to ? " he answered, with a laugh.

" I know I used to vex you often."

" Yes, I used to be vexed, because I had no power to comfort you."

" But you did comfort me"—shyly—" many a time."

" I never gave you what I longed to give you. I had no right to ask you to take anything from me then. I had no right to tell you what you were to me."

She made no answer to him ; she could not speak again after that. They were both silent for a few moments, till presently he said abruptly—

“When I was away, I used often to think that you would forget me. It was only when I saw your face for the first time last night that I thanked God, and felt that I was wrong. For I *was* wrong—was I not, Hilary?” he asked, and suddenly looked at her. And then the next moment, with a happy face, he took both her hands in his.





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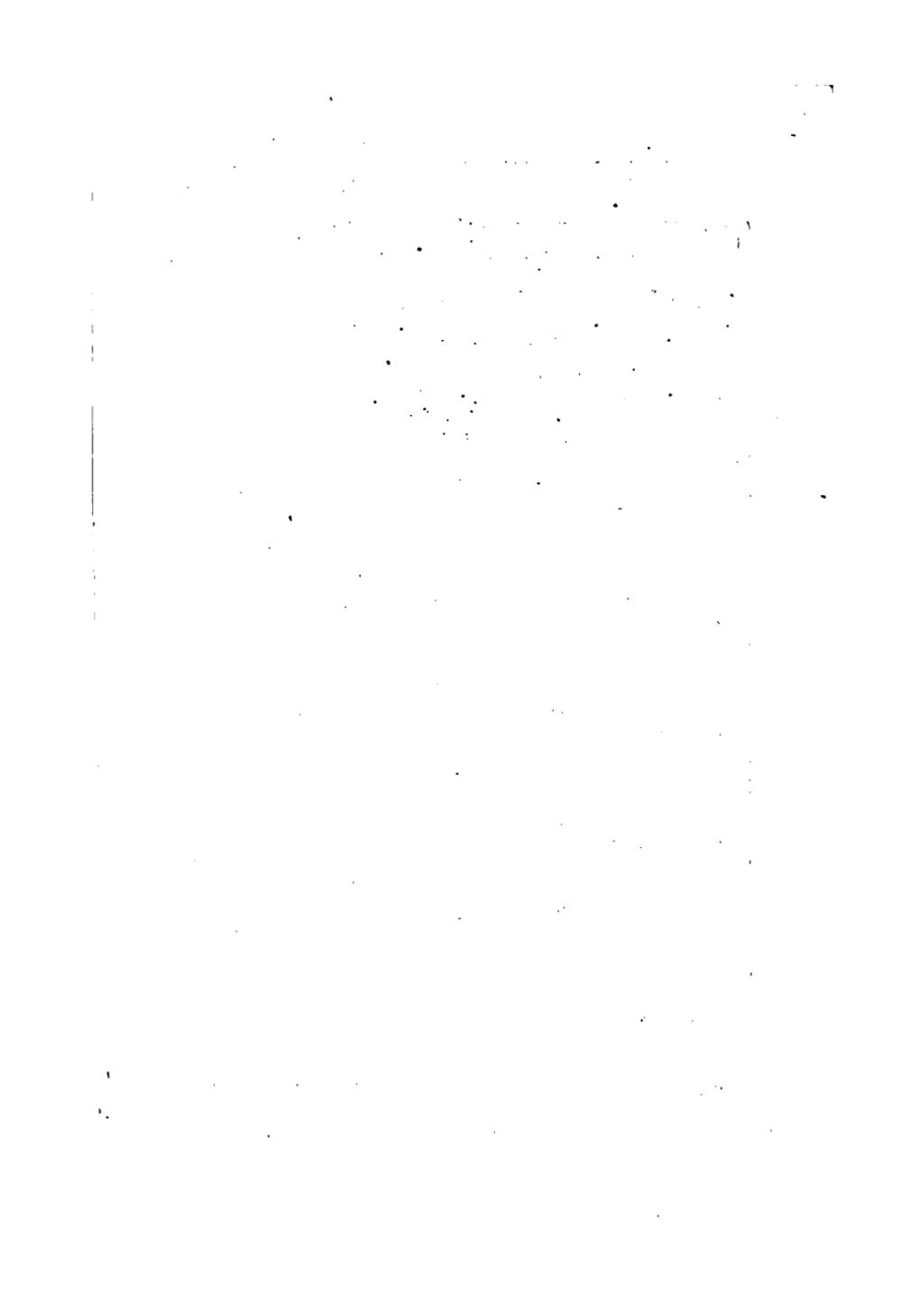
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